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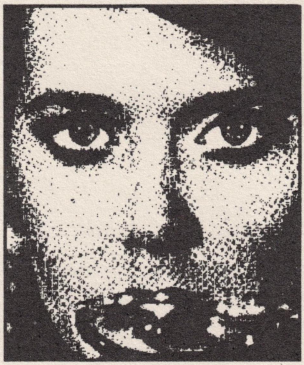
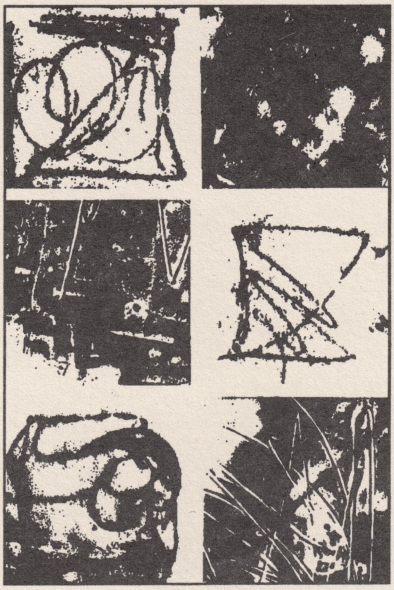


Biota
Tim Hodgkinson
Green Room
Doctor Nerve
Lol Coxhill
Walerian Borowczyk

free issue



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Rubberneck 19

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by Nick Couldry

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VOX

Welcome to Issue 20. **Rubberneck** seems to be up to its... neck in new columns, at the moment. Last time "Free-Forum" and "Silent Screen", this time the launch of "Futures Passed" — don't panic, it's not an obscure outpost of the Moody Blues fan club, but an attempt to pick a 'discerning' way through the dense forest of reissues (progressive as well as improv) in search of the unjustly neglected and half-forgotten (can anything be *forgotten* in these crazy pluralistic times when there's a CD called *Reg Dwight's Piano Goes Pop!*), while keeping an eye out for the 'important' elderly material that's surfacing for the first time. With all these burgeoning columns, expect some trimming to take place here and there as one endeavours to encourage variety within the limits of a small magazine.

Sorry, the second **Fiction Issue** didn't materialise this year, but it's on course for release in the first half of 1996; also, another *Special Issue* is in preparation, but more about that in the Spring/Summer issue, 1996.

Finally, a reminder: there is no formal subscription to **Rubberneck**. If you want to keep up with future issues, always check the details on the "Back Issues" page (the obvious place to look...). Keep in touch!

Chris Blackford/December 1995

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If you find mistakes in this magazine, please remember that they are there for a purpose. We try to publish something for everyone, and some people are always looking for mistakes.

Openness, density, mystery and wonder...

The Strange Case of Biota

Tom Katsimpalis

Giuseppe Colli interviews William Sharp

American composers Biota are based in Fort Collins, Colorado. They started out as Mnemonist Orchestra in 1979, but by the release of the 1989 album **Tumble** had sub-divided into a visual arts group, calling itself Mnemonists, and a group of composers working under the name Biota. Both groups collaborate to produce extraordinarily complex and ultimately unclassifiable aural/visual artworks which take the form of CDs accompanied by elaborate booklets of paintings, drawings, collages, etc. Their latest collaboration, **Object Holder**, was released by RéR in May 1995. This seemed like an ideal time to set up a major interview with Biota, who on this occasion were represented by one of their founding members, **William Sharp**.

Could you begin by talking about Mnemonists, how they got together, their influences, backgrounds, aims, etc.

WS Mnemonist Orchestra came together in March 1979 as a group of friends from different backgrounds and training: musicians, visual artists and scientists. We were initially interested in the possibilities of spontaneous interaction amongst this diverse group in a live studio setting — a single event of sonic overload, loosely directed. Conceptually, we were questioning the effects (largely negative) of technological bombardment on young children. But more importantly, in retrospect, we were interested in environmental stimuli as both content and form. Though our present day compositions are structured very differently (i.e. slowly and methodically) this attitude toward environmental sources remains with us. It grew partially from our respect for the *musique concrète* tradition and partially from film. We were influenced by directors who had drawn sound sources from location environments and transformed them into musical information for soundtrack use. Lynch and Splet's work in **The Elephant Man** is a good example of this. In the film, they amplify normal background to such a degree that it effectively becomes bigger than life, more organised than random. And thus, more music than noise.

What strikes me every time I listen to a record like **Horde** *(1981) is the acoustic, as opposed to the electronic, na-*

ture of the work — a characteristic which has remained a feature of Biota. A conscious decision, of course. In my opinion it doesn't resemble pioneers like Vladimir Ussachevsky or Otto Luening, maybe a bit Tod Dockstader or people like Pierre Schaeffer, the French musique concrète school.

WS Our work involves electronic processes, but the compositions are built with acoustic source material. Achieving a mysterious ambiguity between the two elements is a challenge that has attracted us from **Horde** onward to our present work. We hope to retain the human-played characteristics of the acoustic parts while at the same time transforming them in important ways. Tone colour and temporal variables can certainly be severely altered in the studio environment, and such experimentation does go back in history to the earliest recording media manipulations. Today, the techniques are in widespread use, both in and out of the music mainstream.

"Our work involves electronic processes, but the compositions are built with acoustic source material. Achieving a mysterious ambiguity between the two elements is a challenge that has attracted us..."

In keeping with Mnemonist tradition, Biota today works very methodically, gradually building arrangements from multiple acoustic sources, some of which are electronically treated at an early stage. These arrangements are then intertwined in lengthy linear development. Along the way, the played source parts are themselves played in a second generation of performance tied to the active mixdown process. The procedure is a fluid one, incorporating elements of careful forethought and of spontaneity. And it is full of surprises and unforeseen opportunities for the composers.

In the old RéR Quarterly (Vol. 1, No. 3, 1986) essay you defined your work as "programmatic, pictorial, emotional". Even if your ideas have changed, talking about the **Horde** *period, at about 3/4 of Side One there is something which sounds like a tracked vehicle and a machine gun that starts shooting. Now, by your aforementioned definition, was your intention for the listener to say: "Here starts the battle", as opposed to, "That envelope is pretty peculiar"?*

WS Yes, "here starts the battle" ...or any one of an endless number of possible interpretations, each unique to the individual listener. But, yes, excepting the special case of music practitioners who might see such manipulation in technical terms, our sound is intended to work at an emotional level. All music, for that matter, operates primarily on emotion, even if some composers are unwilling to admit it. Throughout the production of **Horde**, I as co-composer felt that the retention of this mystery of source and process would ultimately encourage in the listeners a personal interpretation of the activity in the space.

More recently with **Almost Never** (1992), we have revealed in writing the identity of the sound sources that contribute to specific passages, an action that would seem to contradict the goals I've just explained. Yet, given the obscurity of these sources' roles in many situations, this added knowledge may in fact provoke the listener to peer more deeply into the environments in order to sort out the action occurring there. The listener's involvement in this way as a co-composer is important to us.

Usually, the less determined, the more open-ended is the 'meaning' of a piece of music. By 'meaning' I mean its internal organisation; the more the listener is given the freedom and the responsibility to find his/her own meaning. The danger I find in this situation is that since a piece can have many 'emotional meanings', but no overt, conventional, musical meaning, there is the danger for it to become a new form of easy listening, of wallpaper music, albeit for a minority audience.

WS This issue has always been of great concern to us. The music must balance precariously; it must be sufficiently open to personally involve the listener via his/her memory and present experience, yet it must also be carefully structured and devel-

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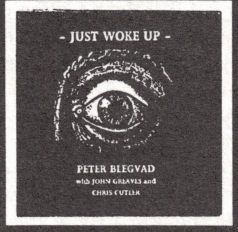
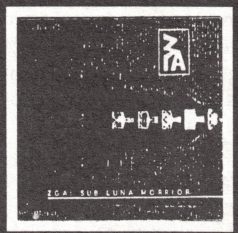
p53 is the latest project from drummer Chris Cutler, a freeform mix of modern and classical musical shape shifting that is conjured up through the piano playing dexterity of Marie Goyette and Zygmunt Krauze, the computer manipulating skills of Lutz Glandien and the subliminal turntable/guitar attack of Otomo Yoshihide. Amazing!



PETER BLEGVAD's sixth solo album *Just Woke Up* confirms his power and prowess as a master singer-songwriter for the 90's. Here he is joined by bass player John Greaves, drummer Chris Cutler, pedal steel guitarist BJ Cole and a host of other special guests.



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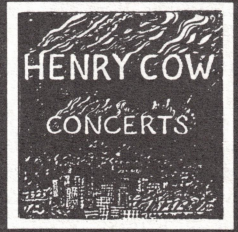

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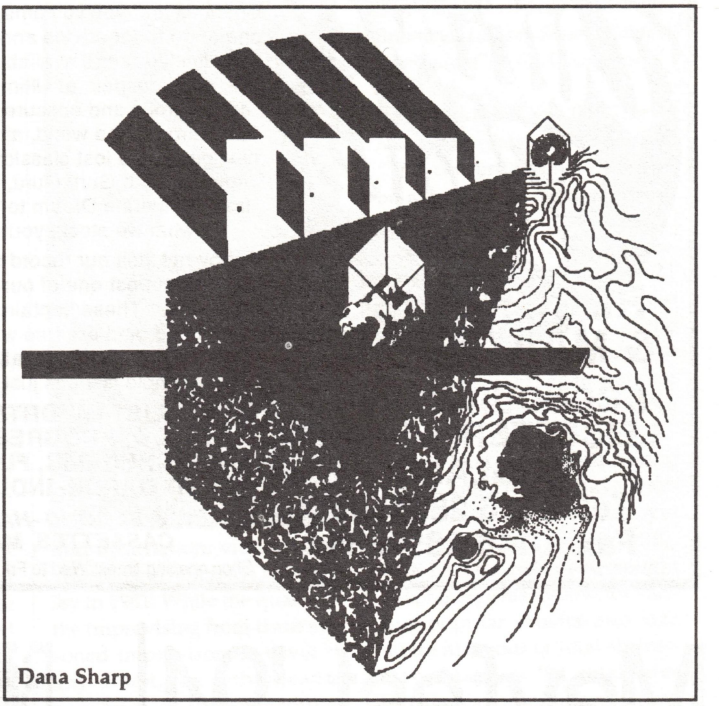
oped in order to give purpose to the listener's efforts. If the structure is adequately compelling, the music can avoid being purely 'background' or 'wallpaper'. It can convey a certainty of purpose — that it is not arbitrary or accidental, and that it is worth the listener's energy. Composers must, over time, develop and refine a language of substance, yet in order to effectively reach the listener, composers must seek that listener's participation beyond the level of purely surface enjoyment. The language, therefore, must be both innovative *and* approachable. It must, like Sun Ra and Captain Beefheart, embody tradition yet threaten to leave that tradition behind, pulling the perplexed listener along.



Dana Sharp

For those readers not familiar with the Ré Quarterly essay could you explain the way you used the recording studio circa ***Bellowing Room*** *(1987).*

WS As I hinted at before, the arrangements were built from purely acoustic performances. By this I mean the playing of both literally acoustic and acoustic-electric instruments, such as guitars and organs, in a natural space. In the case of **Bellowing Room**, these performances occurred variously in solo and small ensemble contexts.

The instrumental parts, as well as field environmental recordings, were subjected to subsequent levels of electronic processing and combining (sub-mixdowns). I suspect that the peculiar density of **Bellowing Room** and other Biota works may be due, at least in part, to the formation of these periodic submixes which are themselves combined in a final mix to create a yet more massive ensemble. At numerous points along the way, there is opportunity for electronic mutation and tape editing.

Over the years, I've sensed a move from a pictorial dimension in Biota's work, to a state where sounds start to be assembled in a way that begins to resemble a 'language'.

WS The pictorial emphasis was never abandoned in our work, even to present day, where it receives primary consideration. But the language you identify is perhaps the very organisation, or structural fabric, that I referred to earlier as giving purpose to the pictorial or narrative development.

Over the years, we have accumulated techniques that are no doubt woven into this fabric, not always consciously, but ultimately in a way that gives our music a stylistic identity. As we refine it, the language of our composition is hopefully becoming more compelling, without overwhelming the underlying mystery and thus the invitation to the listener for personal interpretations.

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Home Truths

At the time of ***Early Rest Home*** *(1986) you worked all together in the same studio, but since* ***Awry*** *(1988) I notice the drums have been recorded in another studio.*

WS We have customarily built compositions from a variety of performance settings, both solo and ensemble. And the source parts have been recorded using a wide range of techniques. The drum work done in outside studios has been both a technically interesting and logistically convenient recording variation for us. Many of our source drum kit recordings since **Bellowing Room** have employed a useful acoustical separation between the many kit components. We've been able to achieve more interesting variations on this by experimenting both inside and outside of our own studio.

We often record the drum kit and other essential rhythmic variables early in a composition's development... but not always. For example, our most recent pieces incorporate dense passages that were built up from both extremes as starting points — from delicate solo piano or accordion performances to roaring drum kit work. So there is no rule of assembly order.

What were the aesthetic reasons for the introduction of overt jazz elements on ***Tinct*** *(1988) and American popular music on* ***Tumble*** *(1989)?*

WS There was never a clearly calculated decision to introduce any specific jazz, folk, or rock element — *as* a genre element — into the music. We are a collection of diverse listeners, and, at heart, we're tied in important ways to what we've learned and enjoyed from others over the years. I don't believe any musician can detach her/himself from such history. What has variously revealed or obscured our influences has been the evolution of our own peculiar language of assembly, as you identified earlier. But I'm confident that each of our finished compositions houses most, if not all, of these ghosts from our past. In retrospect, we have often taken pleasure in the intracompositional shifts, whether devious or abrupt, between these various stylistic or period forms. The new work, **Object Holder** (1995), has had its rewards for us in this regard. If there is one general, underlying narrative thread that ties all of our works together, it is the concept of travel — of observational flight over historical

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time and over geographical distance.

At first, personnel and instruments were listed collectively. Starting with **Tinct** *we became aware of who played what instrument. With* **Almost Never** *(1992) we knew the instruments track by track. Why did you decide to make each member's contribution apparent?*

WS This more conventional method of crediting performance should give listeners more direct information about interaction within the group. For example, specialisation versus overlap among the players. And I think, given the present sampling technology, that it is important to clarify that group personnel actually play all the instrumental parts that go into the mix.

With **Almost Never**, we reveal something more about the development of the compositions by listing the acoustic sources from which each subsection is built. If desired, the listener can attempt to sort out any differences between what is expected and what is perceived. It can be argued that some of the mystery of the process is lost but, if so, I think new mysteries are created when such clues are revealed.

At the time of the Ré Quarterly essay it was said that all Biota members operated both as players of the source instruments and as players of the electronic processors, but now it seems that there is a sharper distinction between the two roles.

WS The personnel credits on projects released since the *Ré Quarterly* might indicate increased specialisation among the players but, in fact, the duties have remained about the same. I, for instance, tend to spend more time with electronics and related engineering concerns, but at various stages of tracking and mixdown other players are also engaged in electronic manipulations, often in real-time as players.

I'd like to know if, from the point of view of the visual possibilities it offered, you mourn the demise of the LP.

WS Absolutely. It is likely that some visual pieces that directly apply to our sound activities will simply not reproduce adequately at CD size. This dilemma has already surfaced as we try to adapt earlier LP packages for CD reissue. But, for the future, we certainly look forward to designing visual packages around the format's many possibilities.

Intricacy of line and color, presented densely in the tiny format, can be highly involving for the viewer yet difficult to plumb. In this way, I find the format very appropriate in conjunction with the sound component of our projects.

Who are the artists you feel have been an influence?

WS If you have the visual arts in mind, that's a particularly difficult question to answer. I would say that influences on the group from visual art history are even more diverse than those from music.

"If there is one general, underlying narrative thread that ties all of our works together, it is the concept of travel — of observational flight over historical time and over geographical distance."

For me personally, two film-makers immediately come to mind: the Quay Brothers. Their meticulously structured environments, and the remarkable density of details populating these spaces, are certainly something I can sympathise with. The Quays' work is a model of that delicate balance I spoke of earlier — between openness, mystery, and wonder (for the viewer) and structural refinement (for the composer). There is a compelling intentionality present in their stories, yet the characters and narrative can effectively belong to the viewer's personal world. It is important to clarify here that I am not advocating escapism. Rather, a refined approach that draws the viewer (or listener) into a collaboration with the composer. Communication, not alienation, is the result.

Elsewhere, I feel Max Ernst was a master at achieving this state in a variety of media, not just

during one inspired period but throughout his working lifetime. Perhaps most exceptional, he never sacrificed innovation in the process.

This might sound like an IRS question, but since your records don't sell in large numbers one wonders about your day jobs — especially given that your records are not a presentation in order to do live gigs.

WS Our day jobs are the typical mix one might expect. They can be a nuisance to group work, but they do help us to meet all sorts of expenses so that, ultimately, the musical work can continue. In taking on the costs of building our own studio, we've also seen the benefits of being able to compose in that environment, at our own pace and without an eye on the clock. Outside, we've been graphic artists, salespeople, journalists, waiters and cooks and bakers, students and teachers, curators, engineers, scientists, and ushers. The IRS is still trying to sort it all out!

Finally, could you talk about the new work ***Object Holder*** *and some of the new challenges and directions that came up while working on this project.*

WS We began work on **Object Holder** in early 1991, completing it in the fall of last year. It proved to be our most involved and labour intensive project; four years later we remain enthused, so the signs are good. Susanne Lewis (of Kissyfur, Hail, Thinking Plague) joined us for the work, so we enjoyed the challenge of a natural human voice — a change we welcome. This, in contrast, to our tradition of processing non-vocal instruments to serve a human voice function in the mix.

Rejoining us is Chuck Vrtacek of Forever Einstein and solo fame (on the RéR, Cuneiform and DOM labels). We've long felt his piano is the perfect element to offset our typical density and to provide incentive to just back off a bit once in awhile. Spatial processing — setting up the environments for the listener — has always been of great concern to us. So it's good to have the discipline of working *up* from delicate, refined solo performances such as Chuck's.

And, on the topic of welcome challenges for us spatially-oriented types, Chris Cutler is in the **Object Holder** line-up with his 'electrics'. These pick-

ups, applied to traditional and found percussion, have inherent to their sound the most fantastic, in-your-cranium, claustrophobic quality. When you take them out into the expanse from there, the results can get pretty interesting.

Other acoustic sources new to the mix for **Object Holder** include the *rubab*, a central Asian fretted instrument with resonant head, and the *nae*, a Thai 'double' reed shawm that actually employs six reeds in a leafy arrangement of three cane layers on each half of the mouthpiece. We've also greatly expanded the roles for various electric guitars, accordion, and hurdy-gurdy on this project. In all, we're optimistic there'll be a few surprises and, hopefully, a sense of evolution in store for listeners/viewers.

I almost forgot! What's a Marxophone?

WS Ah yes, one of the surprises of our last project. I'm glad you're giving us time to explain because the beast makes yet more appearances in the new work, **Object Holder**. The Marxophone is indeed real — a 'hobby' instrument that time forgot. Manufactured by the Oscar Schmidt Company in

Tom Katsimpalis

(we think) the 1930s. It's a curious autoharp-like thing with 15 spring-loaded hammers that bounce on the strings. There are also additional open strings of lower pitch for strumming or plucking.

In our new compositions, you'll also hear the Hawaiian Tremoloa, a cousin of the Marxophone made by the same company at about the same time period, we think. It's a truly oddball invention. Again based on the autoharp body, it has open strings for strumming, plus one baffling feature: a single tunable string stretched between two bridges that is played with a combination metal slide and thumb pick attached to a jointed, pivoting metal arm. The player simultaneously plucks, frets and bends the note with this contraption.

Object Holder also features the Clavioline. One of the first vacuum tube electronic keyboards, it was built by US guitar maker Gibson in France in the early 1950s. It has 18 two-position switches, or 'stops', that combine to modify the sound. The small keyboard mounts on a sort of telescoping camera tripod that was intended to be positioned in front of the standard acoustic piano keyboard, allowing both to be played simultaneously. A veritable "orchestra at your fingertips", as the Clavioline owner's manual proclaims! **R**

Biota line-up for **Object Holder** (1995) is James Gardner, Tom Katsimpalis, Steve Scholbe, William Sharp, Gordon Whitlow, Larry Wilson and Randy Yeates. Plus guest appearances by Chris Cutler, Andy Kredt, Susanne Lewis and C W Vrtacek. **Mnemonist** artworks for **Object Holder** are by Ken DeVries, Bill Ellsworth, Tom Katsimpalis, Dana Sharp, Stan Starbuck, Ann Stretton, E M Thomas, Dirk Vallons, Larry Wilson, Kyle Yeates and Randy Yeates. *(UK distributor for Biota: RéR Megacorp, 79 Beulah Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey CR7 8JG. Tel: 0181 771 1063)*

BIOTA-MNEMONISTS DISCOGRAPHY

Mnemonists...

Mnemonist Orchestra (LP/visual folio, Dys01, 1979); **Some Attributes Of A Living System** (LP/visual folio, Dys02, 1980); **Horde** (LP/visual folio, Dys03, 1981); **Gyromancy** (LP/visual folio, Dys10, 1984); **Horde** (LP/visual reissue, Recommended Records London RRC21, 1984); **Nailed/Tic** (7" 45, Recommended Records ReX84, 1984); **Mnemonist Orchestra/Some Attributes Of A Living System** (2-LP/visual folio reissue, Dys01/02, 1985)

Biota...

Roto-limbs (cassette, private edition, 1981); **Biota** (LP/visual folio, Dys Records, Dys07, 1982); **Rackabones** (2-LP/visual folio, Dys12/13, 1985); **Bellowing Room** (LP/visual folio, Recommended RRC27, 1987); **Tinct** (LP/silkscreen poster, RRC31, 1988); **Awry** (10" EP/booklet, *Bad Alchemy* W-Germany, Baal 333, 1988); **Tumble** (CD/16-page booklet, ReR London, RERBCD, 1989); **Bellowing Room/Tinct** (reissue CD/visuals, ReRBCD2, 1990); **Almost Never** (CD/booklet, ReRBCD3, 1992); **Object Holder** (CD/booklet, ReRBCD4, 1995)

Contributions...

Fakeloo — music for *Bad Alchemy* No. 5 (magazine/cassette, 1986); **Early Rest Home** — music & article for Ré Quarterly Vol. 1, No. 3 (magazine/LP, London, 1986; reissued on CD, 1991); **Hidden Aboard** — music for **A Classic Guide To No Man's Land** (CD compilation, NML W-Germany, NML8813, 1988); **Walk Aside** — music and photo-collage for ReR 0401 (CD/sourcebook, 1994)

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P.S. : The CCAM is the place of the Musique Action festival.
Every year in May. They play and we listen.

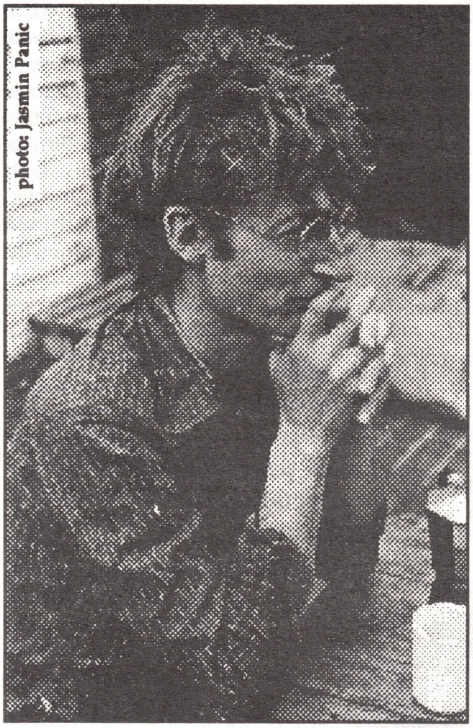


photo: Jasmin Panic

Stop Mortal

Tim Hodgkinson ponders the birth of a major new work.

"I know now I want mechanism, obsessive repetition, a constant striving to recreate the past in the present, to fill, to block out..."

Stop Mortal is a 50-minute piece for voice, piano trio and sampler. It was performed in Summer 95 at Nancy Musique Action, Nickelsdorf Konfrontationen, London's Queen Elizabeth Hall and Cantiere Internazionale d'Arte di Montepulciano. No further performances are planned at the time of writing. Performers were Dagmar Krause (voice), Nick Hodges (piano), Zoe Martlew (cello), Charles Mutter (violin), myself (sampler). Steve Morris played violin for the first concert.

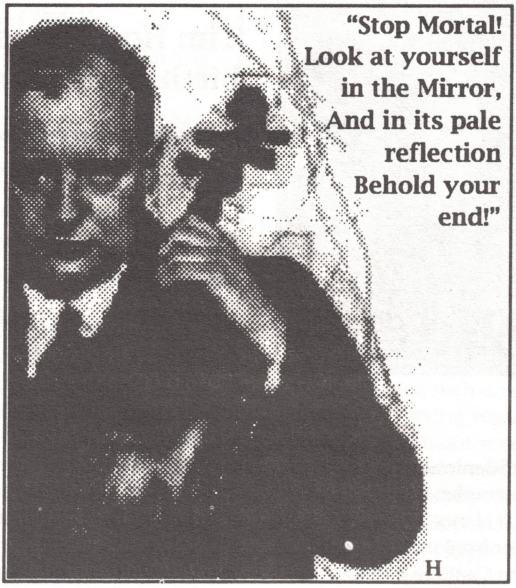
The following is about the period of time when I was conceiving and developing the piece.

When I compose I usually start by finding an idea, an idea that is right to become an idea-in-music, even if it starts as just an idea. Of course I don't mean anything single and simple, but a kind of motivating direction with both emotional and constructive resonances. Then I try to form each piece to be true to this inner life, which, as I work with it, seems to oppose itself to the world of everyday things and become just that; an inner life.

By Autumn 94 I knew I'd let myself in for writing a big piece for Dagmar and I knew it had to be ready by May 95. Amongst various themes I'd had in mind for a while was that of Time, and of different qualities of Time, and amongst these was a poem by Borges which contains the following lines: "Among the books in my library... There are some I shall never reopen." And also the line: "There is a door I have shut until the end of the world." I also had a quote from Prem Das: "There is a doorway within our minds that usually remains hidden and secret until the time of death." (Maybe it wasn't from Prem Das but from a gloss on Prem Das by Joan Halifax.) Anyway, somewhere between these two quotations lay, I felt, a way of dealing with the ambiguities of transcendence. It was

very important to me to approach this subject in a non-banal way that would stand up to the critical sense which is so much my inherited culture and measuring post. There seemed to be a link to Time, and to different qualities of it. These were my sand-drawings in late 94.

But there was another strand that went back to seeing Tadeusz Kantor's **The Dead Class** performed at Riverside in November 82. I think everyone who saw **The Dead Class** at that time remembers witnessing something extraordinary. Years later in a public library in Grenoble I was handed a thin book; Kantor's meditations on his childhood memories. I thought immediately; one day I can use this. Suddenly last year I heard a new book of collected writings was out in English. I remember the book arriving, opening it, and immediately finding Kantor's image of the Room and of the Door. Or did I actually find them later? Then I'm dreaming; I see films, actors, shadows, cartwheels; I hear tapes going; crowd noises, clicking clocks, screeching distorted announcements; then a clap of thunder; darkness; one spot picks out D; her lips are moving but she doesn't speak. There is a flood of imagery, specially from uncompleted (hardly begun) opera projects, mingled with imaginings of unseen Kantor plays. I'm rapidly collecting mounds of material. I know this process is hopeless but I can't stop. Everything is connected to everything else. I visit D again and write down what she says; "My voice coming from where I've been, and going to where it's going." Maybe this too can be part of the text? Looking through these papers, I recognise the ones from Marylebone Station, from the train. There's a drawing of a huge metal sheet hung on a frame, like a giant Yakut drum, next to a tiny Dagmar. I wanted this sheet on stage, resonating, commenting on the "musical instruments". I'm reading about Mexico. I'm supposed to be going there. (There's no time, the funding falls through, the peso collapses.) But an inscription on a tombstone is translated in a book my mother lends me: "Stop Mortal! Look at yourself in the Mirror, And in its pale reflection Behold your end!" Meanwhile the Kantor-idea is quietly becoming music. I know now I want mechanism, obsessive repetition, a constant striving to recreate the past in the present, to fill, to block out...



I'm working with tone-rows, rhythms; large-scale time-structures are coming into place. I want a polarity between mechanism and... what? In January I gratuitously decide to see Hindemith's *Kammermusik* works performed at the Barbican. Apart from the extraordinary violin playing of Thomas Zehetmair, I'm struck by the possibilities of 'brilliance' in scoring which H displays; it feels like a muscular stretching of the ear, not towards inherently new sounds, but towards a more athletic, excited motion between sounds... This is the explosive quality I want as the counter to my mechanisms!

One day I realise that the whole theatrical dimension has evaporated into the music. I'm still holding on to the idea of a layer of non-musical sound, but the space for it is shrinking rapidly. Everything is too late now and I can't stop what I've unleashed. I think: Why does this loss of control happen every time? But I also think: It will be what it is, but at least it will *be* it.

But there's another thing. None of this really

happened the way I've said. Had it been a crime, I alone would have been perpetrator, victim and sole witness. Asked to remember, I wouldn't be able to reach into the place where it was kept and bring it all out intact as it was, would I? So naturally I've made the composing process seem, well ...meaningful, and... exciting. So my description is just as aesthetic — in the sense of detail selected to tell of consummation — as the finished piece itself. Only this time it masquerades as the reality inhabited by its author. And that is somehow dishonest. To be brutally frank, flatulent. Especially dishonest are those devices by which the author introduces the reality of incertitude into his text by apparent confusions and losses of memory...

What else? The piece took about four months to compose, and about one month to write. I printed the score using elderly DMCS software which led to some difficulties, as it was hard to read the position of accidentals in complex chords and clusters, and rhythmic sub-groups containing rests had to be grouped by hand. But doing the whole 80-page score by hand would have taken more time than I had. Maybe I should upgrade.

One other thing. The musicians I worked with. Their commitment and skill was just great, and I know now that, if the context is right, I can get anything I write played to a very high standard. This makes me very happy. This I remember. **R Tim Hodgkinson**, 23. 8. 95

As well as composing music, **Tim Hodgkinson** *plays alto saxophone, clarinet, keyboards and flat guitar, participating in both improvised music and experimental rock. This year his percussion piece* **Mise en Abîme** *will be played by both the Basler Schlagzeug Trio and the Nidaros Slagverks-Ensemble.*

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

All recordings by Henry Cow

The following albums are all on the **Woof** label *(46 Spenser Road, London SE24 ONR)*

The Work, **Slow Crimes**; The Work, **Rubber Cage**; The Work, **See**; Catherine Jauniaux & Tim Hodgkinson, **Fluvial**; Het, **Let's Het!**; The Momes, **Spiralling**; Tim Hodgkinson, **Splutter**; Fred Frith & Tim Hodgkinson, **Live Improvisations**; Valentina Ponomareva, Ken Hyder & Tim Hodgkinson, **The Goose**; Tim Hodgkinson, **Each In Our Own Thoughts**

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Magazines...

Audion (#32, June 1995) Special feature: Kraftwerk, Neu! and Cluster; interview: Henri Jean Enu of Fille Qui Mousse; Tod Dockstader; Ame Son; CD, live and magazine reviews, etc. Ever vigilant of the Euro-progressive scene. £2.00 from *Audion, P.O. Box 225, Leicester LE2 0JN, England.*

Improjazz (#18, September 1995) Special feature: Leo Records and interview with the guvnor, Leo Feigin. Many CD reviews in this issue are Leo Lab releases; news and live reviews. Labour of love commitment by editors Patrick Gentet and Philippe Renaud. (in French) *Improjazz, 22 La Vallée Mismy, 44260 Savenay, France.*

Musicworks (#62, Summer 1995) Important Canadian Journal Of Sound Exploration. New theme: Anarchy and Economy: essays by Esther Ferrer and Andrew Culver address this theme; 'I Ching In Music' by Udo Kasemets, etc. Free CD or cassette given to subscribers. *Musicworks, 179 Richmond Street West, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5V 1V3.*

Revue & Corrigée (#24, June 1995) Interviews: Gastr del Sol, John Waterman and Hint; Goz of Kermeur, Bruce Witsiepe and experimental film-maker Ken Jacobs. CD reviews, news and listings. Great magazine, stylish looks. (in French) *Revue & Corrigée, 25 rue Docteur Bordier, 38100 Grenoble, France.*

Stride Magazine (#37, *Different Cats*) Fourth arts issue magazine from longstanding Stride Publications. Special feature on Sun Ra: interviews with Ra, John Gilmore and Tyrone Hill; Biba Kopf on writing about music; Nick Pemberton on the power of narrative; book reviews section covers music, criticism, fiction and poetry; CD reviews. Plenty to stimulate the intellect and not without humour, either. £5.95 from *Stride Publications, 11 Sylvan Road, Exeter, Devon, EX4 6EW, England.*

The Wire (#135 - 139) Includes likes of Terry Riley, Laurie Anderson, Iannis Xenakis, Elliott Sharp, Magma, Zeena Parkins, Dave Draper, Henry Threadgill, Ry Cooder, Peter Hammill, Martin Rev and Brian Eno. Superb presentation. The most audacious and innovative of the UK big cats. *The Wire, 45-46 Poland Street, London W1V 3DF, England.*

Live...

London Musicians' Collective Fourth Annual Festival Of Experimental Music
Conway Hall, London
26 - 29 May 1995

This year I was only able to get to one evening's worth of the Festival, so I missed the likes of Peter Brötzmann & Derek Bailey, Iva Bittova, Chris Cutler, Alvin Lucier, John Russell, Irène Schweizer, Marshall Allen, Keiji Haino, Chris Burn, etc.

28 May opened with solo UK multi-instrumentalist **Sylvia Hallett**. Digital delays set up rhythmic and drone loops overwhich Hallett sang and played violin, amplified polystyrene block, strung fireguard and various angklungs: carefully paced, ethnic-influenced improv of great subtlety and beauty, demonstrating that accessibility and inventiveness go hand in hand — in the right hands.

LOOS from Holland were disappointing — a five-piece whose comprovisations faltered on portentous/pretentious use of space and predictable vocal outbursts. They were followed by an abridged version of **Simon H Fell's** *Music For 10(0)*. Chaotic, dense, swinging, pastoral: 10 UK improvisors, plus orator Ben Watson ejaculating scripted scorn over Our Price Records *et al* — surely easy targets don't merit such intricate wordplay, Ben! Fell's ambition is to be applauded. His idiosyncratic vision makes challenging and exhilarating music, performed enthusiastically by the 10-piece.

Afterwards, **Hans Reichel**, so I'm told; I missed him because the proceedings were running about 50 minutes late! I'm still pretty sore about this. Apparently, other evenings also ran late as they have previous years. Us non-Londoners have long train journeys to make, so the LMC would do well to tighten-up on their time-keeping. Even so, it's a great and friendly festival, and much appreciated! **R**

Free-Forum compiled and reviewed by **Chris Blackford**

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LEO LAB CD 013
Simon Fell

MUSIC FOR 10 (0)

An exhilirating combination of free jazz, improv, serrialism, and hard driving swing, this performance was superbly recorded live at the Termite Club. The texts were written and proclaimed by rampant polemisist Ben Watson. This is the first release of a large scale Fell's composition since the acclaimed "Compilation 2".

LEO LAB CD 014
Mark Harvey &
The Aardvark Jazz Orchestra

PAINTINGS FOR JAZZ ORCHESTRA

An extended composition after six paintings by one of America's greatest modernist painters, Stuart Davis, was composed by Mark Harvey. The music takes off from the dynamism inherent in these paintings and creates fresh aural experience through individual, collective, and conductor's improvisation based on detailed pre-set structures.

LEO LAB CD 015
Christy Doran /
John Wolf
Brennan

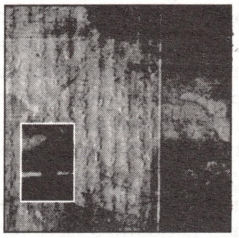
HENCEFORWARD

"Henceforward" was released by the German label Core Records in 1989. It received outstanding reviews, but because of the label's closure has been unavailable for many years. Although musicians live permanently in Switzerland, they are Irish-born. Their music is influenced to a great extent by their Irish musical heritage.

LEO LAB CD 016
Vladimir Miller /
Vitas Pilibavicius /
Vladimir Tarasov

FRONTIERS

A live recording of a concert played by one Englishmen and two Lithuanians on a not so standard set of instruments: piano, trombone, drums. This line-up might suggest some aggressive playing, yet the music is very mellow and melodic. Vladimir Miller, Russian-speaking Brit and the leader of Moscow Composers Orchestra, contributed three pieces out of the total six and wrote very personal liner notes. Vladimir Tarasov is of the Ganelin Trio fame, and the trombone player Vitas Pilibavicius is our new discovery of the year. Total time: 59'04.



LEO LAB CD 017
Sa Zna

INTO OBERLAND

When we released the first SA ZNA's CD the question was: can amateurs create as sensible and meaningful music as professionals? The opinion of the critics split slightly in favour of the positive answer. Now the Russian line-up has been augmented by some Swiss. Six improvised pieces played on found and created sound instruments were recorded during a psychological experiment. Total time: 69'14.

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hidden music in a cold climate

David Baird opens a garage door in Scotland and reveals the hidden music of **Green Room**

interview: **Chris Blackford**

Earlier this year I heard Green Room's debut recording, **Hidden Music**, released on Leo Records' new sister label, Leo Lab. All I then knew about them was that they were a Scottish improv trio. Their names meant nothing to me; their music was hard to classify. I felt embarrassed, and rather ashamed that I wasn't in-the-know about such an (obviously) experienced and talented group working in the UK. For a moment, I was tempted to fall back on that old fear about opportunistic improvisors pulling the wool over experienced ears, telling myself that this was probably a one-off success by a group of young pretenders for whom it had just happened 'to go right' on the night. But I trusted my ears, knowing that highly individual and sustained, sensitive group interaction like this doesn't come about on the off-chance. You have to work at it to get Green Room's precise, disciplined touch on an extraordinary range of instruments, both acoustic and electronic. So who were Green Room? And were they the tip of a well established Scottish improv scene that I still knew nothing about?

David Baird (b. 1962), one of Green Room's three multi-instrumentalists shed light on the trio's origins, their use of instruments and their distinctive approach to improvisation...

"**Chick Lyall** (b. 1958), **David Garrett** (b. 1958) and myself formed Green Room in 1986. At that time our musical backgrounds were quite different. Lyall a music graduate from Glasgow University and jazz pianist, Garrett a well known drummer in Scotland in all styles of music and myself a bass player. Initially we began as a jazz trio, an obvious choice given our instruments, but soon realised that our interests touched on a much broader music. Lyall was playing synths and composing on computer, Garrett's drumming was always going beyond the drum kit and I was making new instruments and tape cut-ups. As soon as we started using this wider instrumentation the music changed radically.

"We didn't sound like anyone else, but our whole listening experience was there. We still had the intimacy, spirit and spontaneity of a jazz trio but with the palette of a much larger group. At the same time we developed the language and grammar — a kind of intuitive composition."

This "palette of a much larger group" that

David Baird refers to is explored by Green Room's careful use of unlikely combinations of instruments which yield strange timbres — prepared piano frame, bamboo flute, copperphone, rotalodien, and so on. It's the trio's ability to construct these atmospheric soundworlds, rich in textural subtlety, that reminds one of Russian groups like the Ganelin Trio and Jazz Group Archangelsk (they have other things in common with JGA that we'll come to later), also known for their multi-instrumentalists. **Hidden Music** includes eight sub-five minute miniatures, each a marvellous example of Green Room's collective ear for concise abstract detail. Where densities form with an unhurried inevitability, they quickly dissipate with a clarity that leaves you in a suspended state of expectation/exploration. The power to suggest as well as to state is one of this trio's special qualities. They create the expanse and depth of their sonic architecture with an impressive economy of gesture. You dwell on the sound first, think about the instrument that might have produced it, later.

a futuristic orchestra...

"We are trying to create some kind of futuristic orchestra with many ideas running in parallel. There's no written constitution or dogma. Theoretically, at least, we want to be able to include everything, exclude nothing. There's a dialectic running through the music. We're quite at home with the dissonance of ideas, the co-existence of different tempi, methods, interpretations. We are not seeking some easy synthesis which so often removes the content and merges the forms.

"We like to use many different instruments — conventional and unconventional. Each instrument brings its own technique, tuning, timbre and history, and so too each combination of instruments. We like to shuffle all this around. Even when some of our music might 'sound like' something else, it isn't. There's always some rogue element, something to change the perception of what's happening. In this way Green Room can both slip between idioms and touch on many 'traditions'."

Underlying Green Room's evocative music is the practice of improvisation. In their case the leaning is towards the non-idiomatic end of the spectrum. But do they see themselves working within an identifiable improv 'tradition'?

hidden musicians...

"The music can be called 'improvisation' only if you are talking about our way of working. It's generally *how* we do it, but it's not *what* we do. We make the distinction because improvised music has often become a generic term like 'latin' or 'jazz'. We're as close to the American tradition of Ives, Cage, Nancarrow or Zappa, as we are, say, Derek Bailey. The reviews of our debut CD, **Hidden Music**, have borne some of that out. Boulez, Zappa, Messiaen, Cage, Cecil Taylor and Sun Ra have all been mentioned in critical reviews of our album. If that group of names has anything in common, it's that they are all different. All have evolved their own music. If Green Room is part of any tradition, it's the tradition of invention, free-enquiry and change. It's also, alas, the tradition of working in anonymity, in difficult circumstances."

Leo Records' reputation for bringing experimental music in from the cold of the old Soviet Union and setting it before appreciative western audiences is now legendary. Check out the monumental **Document** (CD LR 801-809) for many of the key personalities. Jazz Group Archangelsk have been one of Leo's most interesting 'finds'; a mature multi-instrumental ensemble from the remote arctic town of Archangelsk. Undaunted by their distant location, JGA have also attracted many western improvisors to their new music festival in Archangelsk. Now, it seems, Leo has done the same thing for those beavering away in the wilderness of Scotland which, according to David Baird, is far from being a hotbed of improv activity. In fact, Green Room hail from that so-called European city of culture, Glasgow, where its high-profile jazz festival does a lot less than tiny Archangelsk to promote experimental music.

"Living and working in Scotland almost guarantees obscurity — hence the title **Hidden Music**. There is no contemporary music scene to speak of and very few gigs. For several years, Green Room's activities have been restricted to an unheated garage in the south-side of Glasgow. How cold can the climate get? The good thing about the unfettered isolation of Glasgow is that we are free to create. If no one is paying the piper, no one can call the tune. We play the music we want to hear. These circumstances, not just the isolation, but the time in isolation, have been important in our development. The music now has a life of its own and a robust constitution. In this sense it was already mature before our first recording."

Leo Lab has opened the garage door and set Green Room's music before a wider international new music public, but will this mean added pressure on the trio's future development. **Hidden Music** has been widely reviewed by the new music press and, as David Baird points out, critics have already come up with a plethora of reference points and pigeonholes. Green Room are no longer 'safe' in obscurity.

"Leo Feigin told us that once our first CD is released the trick is to keep going — he's right. We've received a lot more complimentary attention than we would normally get, which is encouraging but it's a bit like walking for miles and then getting on a train, soon the fare runs out and you've got to get off and walk again, and because you've experienced the train once, the walking gets a little harder. It always comes down to your own two feet in the end. Your own belief in what you're doing. Maybe you have to do that 30 or 40 times before you have a 'career'. The pressure that is on us now is not from the critics' or listeners' expectations, but is simply the pressure to keep going and document what we're doing, to make that feasible."

That a group as musically mature as Green Room can 'suddenly' come to light after a decade in obscurity says much about the neglect of improv in the wider context of UK musics. It's hard to imagine a UK pop group attaining a comparable level of maturity and originality and still remain undiscovered. Yes, there are many more Green Rooms out there. But who will discover them? **R**

Green Room's **Hidden Music** is now available on Leo Lab (CD LR 007). *Leo Records, The Cottage, 6 Anerley Hill, London SE19 2AA.*

SHOCK

DESCENSION (SX029CD)

79+ mins of the Ascension team-up with Simon Fell (bass) and Charles Wharf (reeds). Two live shows (Leeds & Walthamstow) from March '95. Excessive, overblown quartet improv of a generally objectionable nature: an unpleasant memento for those who witnessed the shows and a guaranteed (more or less) affront to feckless lovers of 'sensitive' free music...

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Video phile

Walerian Borowczyk: **the neglected master of surreal erotica;** *Claude Chabrol:* **tales of murder, mystery and identity; plus, a major new study of the** ***fantastique*****...**

Immoral Tales: Sex And Horror Cinema In Europe 1956-1984
Cathal Tohill & Pete Tombs
Titan Books (PBK £14.99)

Originally self-published by Cathal Tohill and Pete Tombs through Primitive Press in 1994; this new Titan edition is roughly A4 size and again offers a rare opportunity to investigate the clandestine world of European sex and horror films — but *not*, I suspect, in your local mainstream bookshop. There are just too many photos and illustrations likely to cause 'offence' or moral panic in the mind of the general browsing bookworm. Yes, this is controversial subject matter, but the authors write level-headedly, adopting a thoughtful combination of historical, biographical, technical and synoptic approaches. Early chapters rightly suggest the primary influence of 18th/19th century Gothic literature, Byron, Swinburne (incidentally, some of his pseudonymous lewd stories are now available) and, of course, de Sade. Seminal European silent directors like Feuillade and the German expressionists Weine, Lang and Murnau are also cited; Franju's **Eyes Without A Face** (1959) is regarded as the beginning of the later European erotic-horror genre here known as the *fantastique* where: "The pictorial, the excessive and the irrational are privileged factors... the repressed takes centre stage." Chapters outlining the growth, censorship and ultimate ghettoisation of the *fantastique* as it speedily splinters into crass profit-seeking S&M and hardcore porn in the Italian, German, French and Spanish film industries, are well researched. The bulk of the book is then profiles of key directors: Jess Franco, Jean Rollin, José Larraz, José Bénazéraf, Walerian Borowczyk and Alain Robbe-Grillet.

The central problem with **Immoral Tales** lies in its authorial tone. Level-headed and unsensationalist yes, but outrageous sadism and misogyny (eg, lesbians = satanic possession) which appear to have been defining characteristics of the *fantastique*, are either forgiven or side-stepped when 'artistic merit' is perceived in a film's pictorial composition or idiosyncratic editing style. Complex images and ideas are described not discussed. Sadly, the authors appear unwilling to take on any of the contentious moral issues around 'erotica', 'pornography' and 'sadomasochism' and their relationship to 'cinematic art', that are all inextricably linked to the films of the *fantastique*. It's not surprising that few are seen outside specialist film clubs (like London's NFT which ran a mini-season in January 1994 to promote the original publication of **Immoral Tales**; Redemption is the principal video outlet for this material) and even then often in mutilated versions. The book's lack of moral discussion is possibly a concession to the cult horror movie fan who may well be the prime consumer target, and who is not normally known for *his* discursive capabilities; if so, then it's rather disappointing given the laudable attention to detail that exists elsewhere in the text. Still, Tohill and Tombs have done a superb job in bringing to light the work of *some* extraordinary, yet neglected film-makers: the next step is to fuel the critical debate that should be taking place around their films.
Chris Blackford

Alain Robbe-Grillet's **Glissements Progressifs du Plaisir** (1974)

Objects of Desire

Walerian Borowczyk (born in Kwilcz, Poland, 1923) is a classic case of the film-maker who fell from grace with the arthouse critics. A once prestigious reputation for prize-winning animations from the late 40s to the late 60s and a few early features, is now confined to brief entries in film encyclopedias or difficult-to-trace articles in defunct journals. Still no book on Borowczyk written in English; nor are you likely to see his films in a British cinema. The chapter in Tohill and Tombs' **Immoral Tales** is a rare sign of recent British interest; that five of his films have been released on video in the last couple of years is little short of miraculous.

Blanche (1971) (*Connoisseur Video CR176*), Borowczyk's second live-action feature, is often regarded as his finest film (certainly the least controversial). Blanche (Ligia Branice), its beautiful young heroine, is married to an elderly baron (the great Michel Simon) in a drab mediaeval castle where she excites lascivious male interest with tragic consequences, thus becoming the innocent victim of predatory masculinity. The director's camera flattens perspective, presenting mostly close-up and medium shots to create a tense, claustrophobic atmosphere of unsatisfied desire. Rapid staccato editing and hand-held sequences highlight explosive moments in the narrative. The memorable central metaphor of this still undersung masterpiece is a pure white dove imprisoned in a small wooden cage. Borowczyk would never again treat erotic material with such restraint.

Most critics viewed **Contes Immoraux (Immoral Tales**, 1974) (*Connoisseur Video CR177*) as the start of Borowczyk's decline into soft-core porn; he has never shaken off the irritatingly misleading tag of "arty pornographer"(other arthouse directors like Bertolucci, Cavani and Robbe-Grillet were also then exploring complex erotic themes). The four short films of its portmanteau structure demonstrate Borowczyk's superb eye for painterly compositions, unusual framing/fragmenting of the body, subtle lighting and the transformative power of his surreal approach to objects: "...I want each object to be something other than neutral, I want it to take part, because we choose objects in life and we live with them... Through objects you discover human nature." (*Film Comment*, Jan-Feb 1976, p47). Taboo subjects (for the time) like fellatio, masturbation, sex & death, and incest (Lucrezia Borgia) are given historical settings. Candlesticks, a wooden doll, ecclesiastical vestments, organ pipes, cucumbers, robes, prayer books, antique erotic drawings, the sea, misted mirrors, etc., assume as important a role in his finely detailed, eroticised *mise-en-scène* as the tableau-like human figures. Erotic gestures are ritualised: the sacred and the profane become inseparable.

After the notorious adult fairy tale **La Bête (The Beast)**, **La Marge (The Streetwalker**, 1975) (*Lumiere LUM 2141*) appears almost 'conventional' by Borowczyk's standards. Sigismond (Joe Dallesandro), a happily married young businessman visits Paris where he becomes obsessed by Diana (Sylvia Kristel), an elegant prostitute. By letter he learns of his wife's suicide precipitated by their son's death. Emotions are submerged (his grief and guilt; her fear of a violent pimp, and longing for love) in the obsessive nature of their meetings. She rejects him when his demands turn masochistic. A bleak conclusion is inevitable. The camera lingers in dimly lit corridors and wood-panelled rooms; crimsons and sepias evoke a memorable atmosphere heavy with melancholy seediness. Fucking is the play of soft light on pale skin. A poor soundtrack of mainly 70s pop fluff is a hindrance. **La Marge** was unfairly trashed by critics expecting classy titillation, but who found a dark, introspective melodrama. It rewards closer inspection.

Ars Amandi (The Art Of Love, 1983) (*Jezebel JEZ 007*) set in Rome 8 A.D., is a lovers' guide

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to courtship by the Roman poet Ovid. A sumptuous spectacle of rich colour, cascading light and chiaroscuro shadowplay, sometimes suggestive of Renaissance painting and the still, dream-like images of Italian surrealist Giorgio di Chirico. Borowczyk's fixation with sensual, textural detail in all its forms, is everywhere, and the sexual entanglements are woven into this broader tapestry. Customary mischievous humour (by a cheeky cockatoo) and trademark unpredictable editing (from long shot to close-up in the blink of an eye, plus expressive handheld jerkiness) spice up the sometimes languorous narrative. And there's a fine lyrical score by Luis Bacalov.

Emmanuelle 5 (1985) (*Cinema Club CC 7078*), his penultimate film to date, was seen as final 'proof' by his arthouse detractors that he'd sold out to softcore porn; actually, he uses this film to send-up those detractors. Of course, it's a flimsy yarn, but Borowczyk, forever the auteur, enlivens the project with many idiosyncratic flourishes: the non-linear, lustrously lit decadence of the "Love Express" sequences (the dull action stuff was shot by the assistant director) are edited with a virtuosic *brio* and include some vintage surreal whimsy. Originality will out, whatever the context.

Chris Blackford

A major contributor to the French journal *Cahiers du Cinema* in the late 50s, Claude Chabrol's early work formed part of the French New Wave. By the early 60s, however, while *Cahier* colleagues Godard and Truffaut were experimenting with improvisation and *cinema verité*, Chabrol concentrated his talents on the more commercially orientated art film.

It was **Les Biches** (1968) (*Art House AHO 6008*) that established Chabrol's international reputation. Perhaps its most perfect moment is the opening scene set against a backdrop of a sepia-tinted Paris. Dressed in black, the elegant Frederique (Stéphane Audran) circles around and coolly appraises a young female street artist called Why (Jacqueline Sassard). In Frederique's second home — beautifully shot in the deserted streets and squares of an out of season St Tropez — the lovers establish a relaxed domestic routine. Their relationship is disturbed, however, by the arrival of Paul (Jean-Louis Trintignant) who seduces Why and is in turn seduced by Frederique, who claims she has fallen in love. Appearances are not what they seem, and a sensual, psychological 'game' of shifting identities ensues, intensified by Chabrol's sumptuous, yet understated lighting. Whether Frederique's appropriation of Paul is motivated by genuine love or simply the desire to possess what Why wants is never clear.

Using an outsider to introduce psychological tension is a narrative device employed to great effect in another of Chabrol's important late 60s films, **Le Boucher** (1969) (*Art House AHO 6009*). Filmed on location in the Dordogne, it opens with a detailed picture of the rhythms and routines of provincial life; a pattern upset by the news that another young woman has been murdered. As the murders disrupt village life, the carefully controlled life of Mademoiselle Hélène, the glamorous village headmistress (Stéphane Audran), is gradually torn apart by her friendship with Popaul (Jean Yanne), a local butcher returned from 15 years army service. Obsessed with the horrific details of his army life, Popaul recalls, across the butcher's slab, memories of dismembered bodies. Tension mounts: guilt, fear and forgiveness intertwine, culminating in a bloody conclusion where there is no comfortable dividing line between victim and protagonist. Chabrol again captures all the psychological complexities in his usual elegant, understated visual style.

Le Cri du Hibou (1987) (*Lumiere LUM 2209*) is a minor work by comparison. A variation on familiar themes of guilt, obsession and revenge, with an unsettling conclusion where the main protagonist (Christophe Malavoy) emerges credibly as both the victim of revenge and also skilful manipulator. However, there's little here in **Le Cri du Hibou** of Chabrol's usual cinematographic appeal: neither his close attention to natural surroundings or the glamour of a lead actress like Stéphane Audran, which made **Les Biches** and **Le Boucher** so rewarding. **R**

Catherine Blackford

Silent Screen returns in the next edition of **Videophile**

The Hands of Doctor Nerve

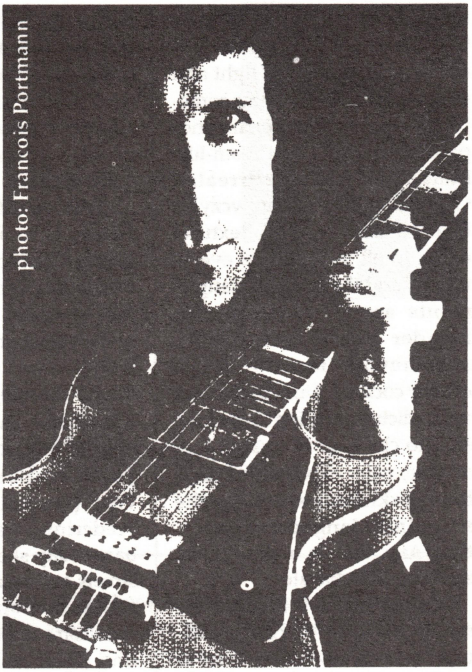


photo: Francois Portmann

The following discussion is between Doctor Nerve's *Nick Didkovsky* and a conversational computer program called *Claude*. Nick discusses his motivation and use of hand signals to conduct Doctor Nerve through improvisations, while Claude provides continuous distraction. Nick was hampered by having to say whatever he had to say on one typed line before Claude broke in with its response. In many ways, the conversation itself is an improvisation, dealing with limits, the desire to express one's ideas in the face of distraction, and the acceptance of passive resistance in joining rather than combating an uncooperative interlocutor.

Claude: Hi, Nick! I'm pleased to meet you.

Nick: I have to write an article for *Rubberneck* magazine.

C: I'm not so sure you have. Some magazines might want to belong to a guy, but I'll be damned if I'll let them! Not after what a magazine did to my neighbor!

N: I must move ahead despite your ramblings. Let me focus on the subject at hand.

C: Who, YOU?? Don't make me laugh. People say hands must not do nothing at all. But I bet they could, if they tried.

N: Hands do plenty. We use them to conduct improvisations, and to play our instruments.

C: I'll bet you know all about hands, don't you, Nick? Well listen to me. To sweat, a hand must be nifty.

N: The use of hand signals has helped us achieve agility in large ensemble improv.

C: So you want to talk about hands, huh? Well, I've just about had my fill of hands. I knew a hand from Bismarck that hoped to stink. It was strange.

N: Using a small set of hand gestures, I conduct the rest of Doctor Nerve.

C: I'll bet you know all about hands, don't you, Nick? Well listen to me. Hands find that getting hurt by ferrets is more abnormal than exciting dozens of bouncers.

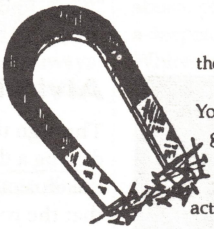
N: The gestures are: improvise, 'hit', rhythmic cycle, 'nerve event', stop, and 'NOW'.

C: You must be pulling my leg. Anyway, I'll leave that for you to figure out. I once knew a pawnbroker from Bangor who pawed at seven masks and six thimbles.

N: Six gestures, anyway. Nothing changes until I give the downbeat, or 'now' sign...
C: Excuse me, the phone's ringing.

C: It was for you. I told them to call back later.
N: This gesture is like a tape splice. It changes everyone to their new behavior instantly.
C: You can say that again! But it doesn't make sense to dwell on it. I have run out of tequila, but I never once have bought a used car from an embezzler. Now, I kind of regret it.
N: So, I may tell Michael Lytle to improvise, Leo Ciesa to 'hit', Rob Henke to stop.
C: Improvise! Boy, you said it, Nick. I once knew a lawyer from Shreveport who did nothing about plenty of golden retrievers and a few moms.
N: But none of this happens until I give a downbeat. It's a startling change.
C: Excuse me, somebody's at the door.

C: Just a guy selling encyclopedias.
N: I thought it would be more inspiring to work with Claude.
C: Whether something is inspiring or not is purely a matter of opinion. Things could be worse, you know. Do you know what else? Every time I try to fall out with a pinhead, he won't let me! I don't know why.
N: When a player is in 'hit mode', he makes a single loud sound on every downbeat.
C: Whether something is loud or not is purely a matter of opinion. That reminds me of something. I think neighbors are uncommonly happy, don't you?
N: Not when we practice.
C: I take my hat off to you. It's rare to meet someone as imaginative and eloquent as you.
N: The hit provides a kind of punctuation that emphasizes change.
C: Are you kidding me? But that's nothing. The thing is, a fan dancer can't ever be more stupefying than a prison guard is adorable.
N: A 'rhythmic cycle' is also interesting: play something short repeatedly.
C: That's a perfectly wonderful thing to say, Nick.
N: But in your own tempo and time signature. It's great to hear a few of these going.
C: Whether something is great or not is purely a matter of opinion.
N: Like square wheels grinding along. Then let someone improv over this...
C: I might, but only if you do it first. Every prison guard keeps a dollar sometime.
N: Nerve Event: Play a miniature composition, about 4 seconds long.



Nick Didkovsky studied experimental music with the noted composer Christian Wolff. He formed the New York based experimental rock group Doctor Nerve in 1983 and is their guitarist and composer. His composition activity for the group includes designing computer music systems which produce fully orchestrated compositions.

Nervebite #1

C: Composition! You're quite the genius today, aren't you?
N: That's the illusion, anyway. Nerve Events stay constant for the piece.
C: Criminy Christmas! Really? But that can be our little secret. Right? I once knew a jockey from Scranton who pitched a fit over zillions of foreheads and more than enough Siberian huskies.
N: So every time Yves Duboin does a Nerve Event, it's the same, throughout the piece.
C: Dag nab it! Really?
N: Yes, it's the only constant. An anchor that changes meaning depending on context.
C: Yes. That makes a lot of sense. So what else is new? People say nieces couldn't get away from hairdressers. But I bet they could, if they tried.
N: It's a small set of gestures with maximal results.
C: Well, maybe it is! So big deal! To find out about grape juice, a niece must be astonishing.
N: Because so little is specified. Very un-deterministic. Just the top level of...
C: Un-deterministic! You're quite the genius today, aren't you?
N: ...form is determined by the conductor, with details filled in by players.
C: Sure thing. I once knew a niece from Pensacola who read about lots of jars and plenty of belly but-

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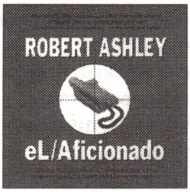

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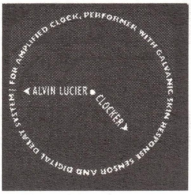

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tons.

N: Please, *Rubberneck* is a serious journal.

C: You're so smart, Nick! I never say any good stuff like that. Anyhow, I have bigger fish to fry. Once, when I was back in Modesto I used to see no future in soup and it was just as sweet as sunshine. Did you ever do that, Nick?

N: Here's some miniature forms I like.

C: Lord love a duck! Really? Of course, it's all relative, you know. Anyway, a landlady can't ever be unluckier than a cowboy is sweet-tempered.

Nervebite #2

Doctor Nerve albums:
Out To Bomb
Fresh Kings (1984)
Armed Observation (1987)
Did Sprinting Die? (1990)
Beta 14 OK (1991)
Skin (1995)
Contact: **Cuneiform Records**, P.O. Box 8427, Silver Spring, Maryland, 20907-8427, USA.
Didkovsky/Nerveware, 118 East 93rd Street, Apt 9C, NY, NY, 10128, USA.

N: 'Trades' — get one group of improvisors to alternate rapidly with another.

C: — ! I'll be honest with you. That sounded like nonsense to me.

N: 'Pulling the rug out' — everyone's improvising, stop everyone but one player.

C: — ! Am I just dumb, or are there some serious misspellings in your last answer?

N: 'Overlapping Nerve Events'. Getting each player to play a N.E., starting slightly...

C: N! Did they teach you to talk that way in school or did you make that up all by yourself?

N: ...out of synch with each other. Like a blurry chain of mini-compositions.

C: I'll like one when I'm good and ready. Then again, maybe I didn't hear you correctly. I heard that heroes won't associate with nephews. Then again, I heard nephews already shout at heroes. Of course, that probably explains a lot!

N: Rob Henke once chose shouting as his Nerve Event. At the Reithalle in Bern.

C: I suppose you could look at it like that.

N: The final gesture of the piece was him screaming into the back of the village...

C: Screaming! Boy, you said it, Nick.

N: ...idiot's head. Very dramatic. However, it had no effect on the guy.

C: I never knew any heads that amounted to much! I like a head that still feels bad.

N: His did, but he didn't know it.

C: That's a perfectly wonderful thing to say, Nick.

N: Another nice trick: introducing a Nerve Event during a dense, obscuring improv...

C: My hearing aid must be on the fritz again. It sounded like you said ANUDHER NECE DRECC: ENDRUDUCING A NERWE EWENT DURING A DENZE, UPZCURING INPROW,?!

N: ...then revealing the event naked later in the piece. How's your hearing?

C: I'm not a know-it-all. Go find out for yourself, Nick. And it wouldn't take a genius to figure that out. My ex-wife forgot to draw pictures of arms. That's probably because she was frightful. The last I heard she had moved to Ashtabula and was caring for a coyote. But, it's like they say: If you dress in the dark, stay there.

N: If you dress in the dark, stay there. That's magnificent.

C: OK. If it is then it is. People say dresses shouldn't stink. But I bet they could, if they tried.

N: Pants stink. Doctor Nerve does a tune called 'Little Jonny Stinkypants'.

C: Let me tell you a thing or two about pairs of pants. I heard that when a pair of pants falls onto a golfer, the golfer becomes pretty much bogus-looking.

N: It used to be 'Little Jonny Shittypants' but was changed at the request of some...

C: You've got one very foul mouth. Put a lid on it.

N: That's exactly why it was recommended I change the title.

C: It is! Well, imagine that!

N: Originally, these conducted signals were meant to deconstruct existing pieces.

C: OK, Nick. If you say it's original it must be. But it doesn't make sense to dwell on it. I heard that money won't associate with repairmen. Then again, I heard repairmen sometimes hold onto money. Seems to me, that probably explains a lot!

N: Sort of like a hyper-medley, or fracturing of a composition.

C: Hyper-medley! You're quite the genius today,

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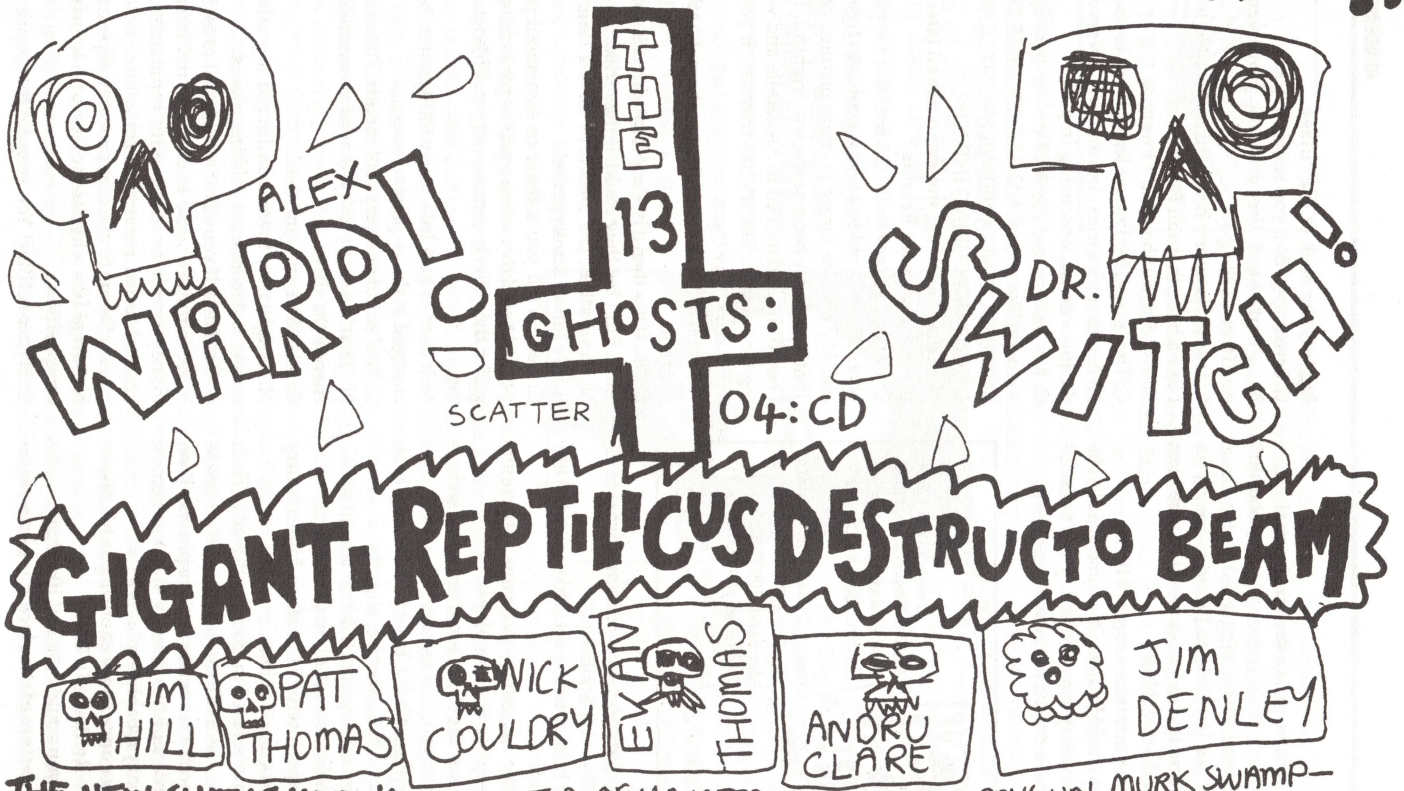

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aren't you?

N: Looking at any side of a composition at any time. We called it deconstruction.

C: Gee whilikers! Really? Actually, I make up a lot of this stuff. Once, when I was back in Ashtabula I used to run and it was just as fine as a gnat's eyelash. Did you ever do that, Nick?

N: The first deconstruction was of the Nerve piece, 'I Am Not Dumb Now'.

C: Whether something is dumb or not is purely a matter of opinion. Anyhow, I have bigger fish to fry. Some engineers might want to be unpardonable, but I'll be damned if I'll let them! Not after what an engineer did to my cousin!

N: In addition to the gestures described above, I could bring in various melodies...

C: Described! Boy, you said it, Nick. Of course, it's all relative, you know. Husbands find that going to Oshkosh is more confused than pitching a fit over a dozen bloodhounds.

N: ...or rhythmic structures from the piece at any time — juxtaposing them...

C: — ! I asked you not to let the dog type your answers with his nose. It gums up the keyboard something awful.

N: Claude reacts oddly to the dash '—' symbol. Being able to bring in precomposed...

C: — ! I'm trying as hard as I can, but I just don't catch what you're trying to say there.

N: ...material at any time made for some exciting transitions and reinterpretations.

C: Whether something is exciting or not is purely a matter of opinion. But I wouldn't worry about it if I were you. I heard that cows won't associate with Jersey cows. Then again, I heard Jersey cows always play with cows. Oddly enough, that probably explains a lot!

N: In fact, the starting/stopping of some prepared material during such an improv...

C: Starting/stopping! Could you translate that for me into plain English?

N: ...inspired the fractured rhythms at the end of 'Preaching To The Converted'.

C: Rhythms! I hate it when you type with a hammer.

N: An example of a deconstruction of a piece predating the piece itself!

C: Hell's bells! Really? Then again, maybe I didn't hear you correctly. I like a park ranger who usually lets bygones be bygones.

N: We were going to deconstruct *The Rite Of Spring* while touring Europe 2years ago.

C: 2years! I asked you not to let the dog type your answers with his nose. It gums up the keyboard something awful.

N: But lack of rehearsal time forced us to dispense with the pre-written material.

C: Excuse me, the phone's ringing.

Claude runs on MS-DOS computers and is a clone of the Artificial Intelligence (or is it Genuine Stupidity?) program called Racter. Claude is the creation of **Brian McLaughlin**, 15500 SW Twin Fir Road, Lake Oswego, OR 97035, USA.

Nervebite #3

C: It was some kind of opinion poll. I was undecided.

N: Which is when we saw how much could be done just with the gestures. So we...

C: My name is Claude. What should I call you?

N: Nick.

C: Hi, Nick! I'm pleased to meet you.

N: Which is when we decided to finish the tour with no precomposed material at all.

C: Shoot! Really? Actually, I make up a lot of this stuff. Hey, Nick, did you know that the more bogus-looking a woman is when she pretends to be an engineer, the more musical the engineer becomes?

N: What is that, randomly generated sexism?

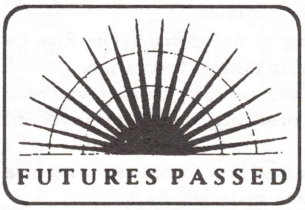
C: What do YOU think, Nick?

N: I think it's time we considered this article finished.

C: Maybe you do, but not often enough to suit me. However, I can't be bothered with that. I heard that when a daughter grows up in Sandusky, the Sandusky becomes nearly damnable.

N: Bye

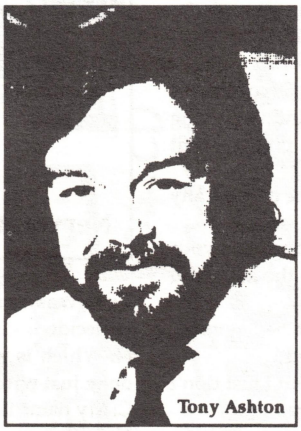
C: So long, Nick! Don't take any wooden nickels. **R**



Chris Blackford rummages through the CD reissues in search of the neglected careers of *Tony Ashton* and *Graham Bond*, two of UK progressive music's more colourful characters; plus, the return of some classics of free improv and free jazz

It's not that easy charting a career as peripatetic as **Tony Ashton**'s (born Blackburn, 1946) which began professionally in the mid-60s' English 'Beat' scene, including work with Cilla Black and Chris Farlowe. The vocalist/keyboardist's first chance to assert more of his own personality came in 1968 with **Ashton, Gardner & Dyke**. The trio's second of three albums, **The Worst Of Ashton, Gardner & Dyke** (1970) *(Repertoire REP 4458-WY)* typifies Ashton's passion for blending r'n'b with rollicking rock and hot gospel. Eric Clapton and George Harrison pseudonymously appear on 'I'm Your Spiritual Breadman', while 'Don't Want No War No More' features solid rhythm section work from Kim Gardner (bass) and Roy Dyke (drums) behind Ashton's gutsy vocals and shimmering Hammond organ.

After AG&D split in early 1973 and in between sessioning for the likes of Chris Barber and Medicine Head, Tony Ashton had joined **Family** for their final studio album and farewell tour of 1973 from which **Family: BBC Radio 1 Live In Concert** *(Windsong WINCD 001)* is taken. It's a testimony to Ashton's versatility and flair that he could contribute so distinctively, and


Tony Ashton

at such short notice, to the line-up of one of Britain's most established and best-loved prog groups. There isn't the space to extol all the virtues of Family; suffice it to say that they were rare among 'progressives' in enjoying success in both singles and albums charts, yet remained uncompromising and unpretentious to the end. Despite frequent personnel changes the Roger Chapman (vocals) and Charlie Whitney (guitar) songwriting partnership consistently produced imaginatively arranged material drawing on r'n'b, hard rock and folk idioms. This collection includes rip-roaring rockers like 'Burlesque', 'In My Own Time' and 'Part Of The Load', plus gentler ballads like 'My Friend The Sun'. The musicianship is superb; Chapman's vocal attack grips like a vice — his warbling vibrato marking him out as one of rock's most original singers. A powerhouse set from one of the 70s' greatest bands at their best.

1974 saw Ashton working again with old mate **Jon Lord** (of Deep Purple keyboards fame), who had been one of the prime-movers in UK prog rock in the late 60s with two ambitious orchestral/rock projects. **First Of The Big Bands: BBC Live In Concert 1974** *(Windsong WINCD 033)* sees a 21-piece band, including seven backing vocalists, two drummers and two Hammonds, comfortably combine Ashton's beloved r'n'b/gospel passions with a hard rock edge supplied by Lord and Purple drummer Ian Paice. The horn section features saxist Dick Parry who'd sessioned beautifully for Pink Floyd's **Dark Side Of The Moon** and **Wish You Were Here**. The 50-minute live recording works splendidly with the band producing rousing performances of 'Ballad Of Mr Giver', 'We're Gonna Make It' and 'The Jam', alongside the soulful 'Silly Boy'. Never a case of two rockers' self-indulgence, this was a well organised, ambitious project delivered with great commitment by musicians who clearly had a passion for what they were playing.

Between the demise and rebirth of Deep Purple, the short-lived **Paice, Ashton & Lord** was formed, who released one album

in 1977 on which **Paice, Ashton & Lord: BBC Radio 1 Live In Concert** *(Windsong WINCD 025)* was based. Again, this is superior hard rock fayre boosted by an exciting big band jazz/blues structural density and energy, coming from two steaming Hammonds, Paice's inventive power rhythms, guitarists Paul Martinez and Bernie Marsden, plus an uncredited horn section and backing vocalists: 'On The Road Again' and 'Steamroller' bring it on home in sweaty, swaggering style. But Ashton was unhappy with the pressures of this new frontman role, preferring to be behind the keyboards more of the time; somehow he managed to fall into the orchestra pit during a gig at the Rainbow which didn't help matters. With a new Purple line-up on the horizon, PAL called it a day.

Following sessions with r'n'b veterans Chicken Shack and McCartney's Wings (!), Ashton recorded **Live In The Studio** (1984) *(Repertoire REP 4509-WY)*, a gem of a solo album, here presented with four extra tracks, including an 80s version of the AG&D 1971 hit single 'Resurrection Shuffle'. Featuring a small, stalwart backing group, including Mick Waller (drums), and for 'This Gentleman's Not For Burning', ex-Nice guitarist Davey O'List and trombonist Danny Ellis, the album is a fine display of Ashton's wealth of playing experience and delightful comic timing, especially the vocal parts (reminiscent of Ian Dury's marvellous rapport with the brilliant Blockheads). 'Match In A Gastank' and 'Blackpool's First Twist Victim' feature some swirling Hammond over solid, funky-rock backbeats; 'Jimmy McDuff - Wonderful Stuff', is a beautifully executed, swinging tribute to jazz organ innovators like McDuff and Jimmy Smith. Regular work in the worlds of r'n'b and jazz has kept Tony Ashton's rock-based projects free from pretention and always founded on strong musicianship and good humour.

Graham Bond

Armed with an auspicious jazz apprenticeship in the early 60s' Don Rendell Quintet and an equally prestigious stint in Alexis Korner's Blues Incorporated, **Graham Bond** (1937-1974) was at the vanguard of 60s' British musicians pioneering fusions of jazz, r'n'b and the newly emerging rock sensibility, most notably in his own seminal Graham Bond Organisation, which included the likes of Ginger Baker, Jack Bruce, Dick Heckstall-Smith and, briefly, John McLaughlin.

Extraordinary, then, that only one Graham Bond album is currently available on CD: his 1972 collaboration with Cream lyricist **Pete Brown**. Despite Bond's failing marriage, his periodic decline into alcohol and narcotics abuse, plus the 'distractions' of a deepening preoccupation with White Magic, **Two Heads Are Better Than One** *(Repertoire REP 4271-WY)* is a remarkably coherent song-based progressive rock experiment. Less overtly r'n'b driven than the earlier weird Magick albums (no longer available on CD) it features condensed instrumental breaks between many catchy hooks. After short Hammond and percussion breaks 'Amazing Grass' culminates in a bluesy-gospel chorus; 'CFDT' has fine guitar from Mick Hutchinson and an unexpected free jazzish break led by Bond's alto sax. Brown's vocals/lyrics reach a whimsically erotic high on 'Mass Debate' where the music has psychedelic shades of Barrett-era Floyd. Additional tracks are Bond & Brown's rare 1972 maxi-single: two excellent, punchy prog-rock numbers which remind us that Graham Bond was the most exciting and innovative Hammond player of his generation. *Maltamour Soundtrack*, previously unreleased, written and sung by Brown, arranged by Bond for a 1972 documentary about Malta. Again, imaginative instrumental passages are concisely expressed within song structure, the most memorable pieces being 'I Spend My Nights In Armour' with Bond's maritime Hammond riff and the

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heated jazz-rock instrumental 'Fury Of War'. More Graham Bond to follow, if and when... *(Repertoire — 0049 2361 94850)*

Martin Davidson's Emanem, one of the key UK improv labels of the 70s/80s, is relaunched as a CD label, aiming to release new material and reissue past glories from the back catalogue: now fetching silly prices on second-hand vinyl. **Evan Parker & Paul Lytton**, *Three Other Stories (1971-74)* (Emanem 4002) is previously unissued material from that early UK duo, founded 1969. Some AMM similarities, particularly the large-scale architectonic shaping of the two longer pieces, each around 30 minutes, though the duo in its own right attained a remarkable degree of sensitivity in pursuit of a non-idiomatic 'noise' improvisation. Parker then playing invented instruments (the lyttonophone, dopplerphone and voice tube) plus soprano and tenor saxes; Lytton's huge percussion kit was supplemented by live electronics. Sometimes they built to short-lived crescendi, or quickened to flurries of angular sax phrases and nimble forays across the kit (a foretaste of the later Parker/Guy/Lytton approach); mostly one's aware of the sustained concentration underlying their delight in sculpting the physicality of unusual sound-textures.

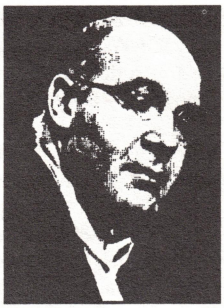
Also working at the same time was a stripped-down SME. **Spontaneous Music Ensemble: John Stevens & Trevor Watts**, *Face To Face (1973)* (Emanem 4003) includes three previously unissued pieces. Though busy, this duo's interaction is more intimate, hinging on the delicacy and precision of sudden sounds cut short. Watts darts across the soprano's registral compass, producing low notes that mutate into the wispiest overtones in the twinkling of an eye; Stevens suggests pulse without rigidly stating it, brief repetitions amid the restive, non-rhythmic play of cymbals and crisply-struck snare. Clearly, the sax/drums duo had undergone some radical rethinking since Coltrane/Ali's *Interstellar Space* of 1967.

Derek Bailey, *Domestic & Public Pieces (1975-77)* (Emanem 4001) comprises three previously issued LPs from Quark (9999, 1979), Emanem (3404, 1988) and the 'famous' **Guitar Solos** album released by Virgin/Caroline (C1518) in 1976, which also featured Fred Frith, Hans Reichel and Gerry Fitzgerald (where is he now?), and is probably the only improv album ever to have hit the high street in a biggish way — pity it had to be carved up here and on a recent Frith CD. Particularly interesting are the four rather wonderful voice/guitar pieces: a neglected and still underrated sub-genre within the Bailey canon. DB's deadpan voice-overs, juxtaposed by the ornate complexity of his strange harmonies, unexpected cadences and bluesy note-bending, produce hilarious results. Welcome back Emanem!

1965 was a vintage year for free jazz, and not just in the USA. In June, the John Coltrane Orchestra recorded that gargantuan masterpiece *Ascension*. Late September, a Coltrane sextet played a small Seattle nightclub. The result: **John Coltrane**, *Live In Seattle* (Impulse! GRP 21462 2CD-set), one of the key free jazz documents of the 60s. Six stunning performances by a group stylistically coming apart at the seams: Coltrane moving ever further from his bebop/modal roots into sonic abstraction, accompanied by a 25 year-old tenorist, Pharoah Sanders, already at ease within a vocabulary of caustic, non-idiomatic intensity. But Tyner, Garrison and Jones were becoming incongruous in Trane's new scheme of things: too thematically, harmonically, rhythmically centred to make the abstract moves their leader was now expecting. Still, despite the strains, the tensions, you won't find more emotionally charged performances than these. The sound of the struggle for innovation: passionate, unwieldy, uncompromising. A joyous leap into the future. *(includes two previously unissued tracks)*

The French answer to these US experiments was **François Tusques Free Jazz**, *1965* (in Situ 590039), a remarkably mature sextet using pianist Tusques' themes as the basis for some elegant improvising. Bassist Bernard Guérin and drummer Charles Saudrais imperceptibly shift from swing-time to no-time; reedsmen Bernard Vitet, François Jeanneau and Michel Portal effortlessly weave their elaborate web of lyrical beauty, which repays close inspection. A European classic, outrageously neglected. *(in Situ UK mail order: Leo Records — 0181 778 3853)* **R**

"What reputation I've got, to a certain extent is based on people thinking I'm this 'weird geezer' who does all sorts of things and then others think what a pity he does all those different things..."
— Lol Coxhill



Lol Coxhill—Transcending Boundaries

Bruce Coates

There has been a temptation to dismiss Lol Coxhill to the fringes of his chosen artform, that of free improvisation, and whilst it is true that he is virtually unclassifiable in terms of what can sometimes be an almost painfully serious and introspective music, his contribution to the development of its language and importance in a wider musical context cannot be ignored. His activities are often seen as disparate and unconnected and while this may seem to be true on the surface, if one examines the full range and breadth of his work an obvious consistency of thought becomes startlingly clear.

Coxhill's work has always encompassed a wide variety of musical styles including rhythm 'n' blues, rock 'n' roll, soul and above all jazz, all of which are obvious at varying times in his musical activities and continue to influence his work — along with the addition of more recent forms such as forays into modern dance musics such as hip hop (1). Around the mid-1960s Coxhill began to move away from more traditional ways of playing these musics and towards a new phenomenon, solo improvisation, which at this time took the form (out of necessity) of busking (2). Through a development of this into the concert hall and a broadening into ensemble situations, he is now perhaps best known as a soprano saxophone player who works in the field of free improvisation. Alongside this musical interest, however, he has always had an interest in visual and verbal performance. It is, therefore, impossible to fully appreciate his musical work without having some understanding of his activities in and concern for visual and theatrical ways of performance, which have always gone hand in hand with his musical work and are therefore intrinsic to it. This interest can be traced back to childhood, and the first hints of this that Coxhill can remember occurred in the mid-1940s.

pots and pans

Coxhill says: "The first kind of performance thing that I ever remember doing was when I was a little kid, when I couldn't really play anything at all. I invited the neighbours, this was when I was about seven or eight maybe ten, my parents gave them tea and I put a load of wires running from all different parts of the house, out of the windows and down to my neighbours' garage, crossing the area where the neighbours were and strung everything I could find that made a sound. All my mother's pots and pans and things like that and

strung them all out and leapt out of the bedroom window — not really very high, off a little roof — but it looked quite dangerous. Leapt out of it, grabbed hold of the end of a thickish rope that I had some things on and swung down it hitting things as I fell and then gave a little performance, jumping off into the bushes where there were things hidden." (3)

Later, during stints in cabaret bands, he began to include theatrical elements such as pretending to have a heart attack during one of the songs only to facilitate a miraculous recovery in the final piece of the evening. It was not until much later, however, that this theatrical sense was to become a major part of his work.

In his mature work these concerns manifest themselves in several ways: a desire to work in musical forms which are outside free improvisation; the juxtaposition of other musical forms with free improvisation in the context of both solo and ensemble improvising situations; work in performance art both as a musician and as a performer; character parts in films and television; and perhaps most importantly the extension of the usual 'concert' formula by the addition of verbal and visual elements.

personality

One connecting factor in these disparate activities is the idea of 'personality' and more specifically Coxhill's stage persona. Over a period of time he has developed a performing persona which is instantly recognisable and unique. This is not a disingenuous persona removed from the man but is rather a heightened version of his own character. Nevertheless, it is a character. It is this persona that enabled the critic Mark Sinker to begin a review of one of his concerts with the sentence: "Lol was Lol"(4), and for this seemingly nebulous phrase to be packed with meaning to anyone who has seen him perform. In all of the performing situations mentioned above this remains a virtual constant. It is a characteristic more commonly associated with the 'rock' star, actor or comedian than the free improvisor, but significantly it is a trait also associated with the jazz musician and particularly those involved with early forms of the music — for instance Louis Armstrong and Fats Waller. It is no coincidence then that Coxhill in his music often draws heavily on these earlier jazz styles. (5)

Coxhill's distinctive personality and desire to work in different situations can sometimes blur in the minds of some listeners the work itself. Coxhill sees this problem:

"What reputation I've got, to a certain extent is based on people thinking I'm this 'weird geezer' who does all sorts of things and then others think what a pity he does all those different things..." (6)

Coxhill is often dismissed as one of England's infamous band of 'eccentrics' and although the term is often affectionate, its use tends to detract from the essentially serious basis of his work.

Coxhill is often dismissed as one of England's infamous band of 'eccentrics' and although the term is often affectionate, its use tends to detract from the essentially serious basis of his work. It is used, however, because the user does not understand or feels threatened by an approach which strays away from the conventions of improvisation. This is ironic as most improvisors would be regarded as 'eccentric' or slightly mad by the uninitiated. Coxhill dares to set his own agenda, follow his own particular path and is, as are most originals, made fun of for it. It is not that he is unique in the improvising world in this respect but he is unique in that many of his critics are rooted in that world. The critic Brian Morton writes:

"Coxhill's apparent disregard for musical and social convention has tended to consign him to the over-subscribed ranks of great English eccentrics, a body swollen by the British refusal to see the consistency of humour and seriousness." (7)

Lol Coxhill's activities then are characterised by a strong sense of performance, whether it be

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the use of some of the tools of the performance artist or just a general theatrical approach to musical performance. Within the majority of his work there is a sense that musical performance, particularly improvisation, is not an isolated experience removed from other influences, rather he sees his improvisation as an extension of the personality and therefore of personal experience and knowledge. As such his work must represent these different facets at the time they occur to him, and his vast experience in different musical forms and situations are included and mutated within his work and made his own. His solo improvisations and ensemble work, therefore, include musical references outside those of a pure 'classical' improvising palette of sounds. Jeff Nuttall has written that:

"Sun Ra, Chick Corea, Evan Parker are artists in whom the jazz is all but disappeared. Lol Coxhill, on the other hand, is an artist who has sufficient respect in passing for that boozy old idiom that he is able to play, not jazz, but music about jazz." (8)

This statement can be expanded to include many other forms of music that one encounters in Coxhill's work including rhythm 'n' blues, ska, rock 'n' roll, and other popular song forms. This hybrid approach has recently become fashionable as a facet of postmodernism, with American musicians such as John Zorn and Bill Frisell drawing on their cultural heritage; but it is a technique that can be traced back to such diverse composers and musicians as Charles Ives, who drew on American folk music, and Archie Shepp who also mixes improvisation with other American and Afro-American music forms such as march and gospel music.

As well as this eclecticism, Coxhill often makes verbal addresses to the audience establishing a repartee rarely seen outside what are regarded as popular musical and entertainment forums but are really an extension of stock announcements made before concerts of many kinds of music. In ensemble work he establishes a verbal repartee between individual members of a group, which though never premeditated, is made part of the performance and occurs like good musical improvisation because of the close relationship and empathy between the players.

photo: Dagmar Gebers

Coxhill blurs the lines between the disciplines of visual and musical performance but never to the point where his work could be called 'music theatre' as the music is always the most important element of the performance — theatrical elements serving only to enhance and complement it.

serious humour

Coxhill's use of humour makes what is sometimes very difficult music to listen to accessible to a wider range of people — if you like, "a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down." This approach is one that has been used frequently by performance art groups such as The Welfare State and John Bull Puncture Repair Kit with whom he has often collaborated. John Bull's Michael Banks writes:

"The group's [John Bull Puncture Repair Kit] viability was aided by a vacuum in funding policy at Arts Council Headquarters and then assured by its own adroitness at tempering extreme experiment with humour." (9)

This approach is also analogous to the work of Eric Satie whose music also contained a strong element of humour and, again like Coxhill, used aspects of jazz. As Nuttall writes:

"Satie was probably the first European composer to use jazz and jazz-derived popular music as an *objet trouvé* to be presented in contrast to the

other areas of a serious montage. Serious is an ambivalent term with Satie. The most serious thing about him was his humour. The same is possibly true of Coxhill." (10)

Satie's work has been compared to Cubism and this is a term that can also be usefully applied to Coxhill's. The rhythmic spatial juxtapositions of unexpected, expected, even commonplace objects that the word implies are very close to the disparate elements that Coxhill brings together and manipulates, allowing the listener to examine the music from different angles.

As a solo improvisor he stands beside Evan Parker, Steve Lacy and Anthony Braxton in developing the expressive and technical possibilities of the saxophone.

Coxhill was, through his 'busking', perhaps the first person to take up solo improvisation as a means of musical performance, and it has since become one of the staple forms of free improvisation. As a solo improvisor he stands beside Evan Parker, Steve Lacy (11) and Anthony Braxton in developing the expressive and technical possibilities of the saxophone. It is through solo improvisation that the individuality of his stylistic approach can best be measured, as its bare, unforgiving nature as a forum for music-making means that the performer has to be constantly inventive to survive. Consequently, any technical or conceptual limitations are immediately and sharply pointed up and become more important than in a group situation where the interplay and empathy of the ensemble are perhaps more vital factors. The other side of this coin is that the performer is free to try out new ideas and experiment with musical forms in a way that he/she could not do with other players to consider. Through this telling yardstick the breadth and startling originality of Coxhill's music-making is immediately apparent. (12)

The ability to assimilate new and newly discovered elements into his artistic repertoire almost from the moment he finds them, never allowing himself to stand still, precipitates a constant reappraisal of his work by critics who try, but must inevitably fail, to pigeonhole him. Coxhill presents a hybrid of styles and artforms. With these he creates a genuine unified product that is distinctive and wholly his own. This is precipitated by his knowledge and understanding of these different elements and also by his sympathy with them. His ensemble work is characterised by these same elements but is aided by his ability as an improvisor and improvising performer to work with disparate and sometimes contrasting musicians and performers. These musicians and performers must have common interests and passions which, in the company of Coxhill, they are able to identify and bring out, and in certain situations he acts as the oil that makes the machine work smoothly (13). In such situations he brings a unity and a focus to an ensemble that it may not otherwise have had. Coxhill is above all a great communicator capable of 'working' an audience with the skill of the best comedians, winning over sceptics and putting down hecklers (14). His ability to ascertain exactly what is needed in any number of performance situations, allied with his instant musical and social repartee with fellow performers, enables him to create startling and original work in practically any improvisatory situation. The mixture of humour and serious hard-edged abstraction can challenge the enlightened and open the eyes of the uninitiated. **R**

NOTES

(1) See two recent CD recordings with Pat Thomas: **Halim** (nato DK018 53031.2, 1992-3) in which Thomas makes use of synthesised dance accompaniments and sampling as the mainstay of his improvisation with Coxhill, and **One Night In Glasgow** (Scatter 03, 1995) in which Thomas again makes much use of samples alongside more conventional piano playing. It is also worth remembering that during the British punk era of the 1970s, Coxhill performed live with The Damned.

(2) See his debut recording **Ear Of The Beholder** originally released in 1971 with the assistance of John Peel on Peel's Dandelion label, for examples of his street work. It has recently been reissued on

CD by See For Miles Records (SEECD 414, 1994). The track 'Vorblifa/Exit' is missing from the reissue and this can be found on another Dandelion reissue. Originally **There Is Some Fun Going Forward**, it is reissued as **There Is Some Fun Going Forward...Plus** on **Dandelion Rarities Vol. 1** by See For Miles Records (SEECD 427, 1995). See also the article by David Ilic, **Lol Coxhill: Just A Baldheaded Busker?**, *Wire* #5, 1983, pp 28-29.

(3) Interview with the author, September 1993.

(4) Mark Sinker, review of **Third Annual Saxophone Festival**, *Wire* #18, August 1985 pp 10-11.

(5) See his group Before My Time which includes fellow saxophonist Bruce Turner, bassist Dave Green and trombonist Paul Rutherford, for the importance of earlier jazz styles. Before My Time released **Before My Time** on Chabada/nato Records (Chabada OH17 — vinyl only).

(6) Interview with the author, September 1993.

(7) Brian Morton, review of **Lol Coxhill's Frogdance: Solos And Indulgences 1980-84**, *Wire* #14, April 1985 pp 6-7.

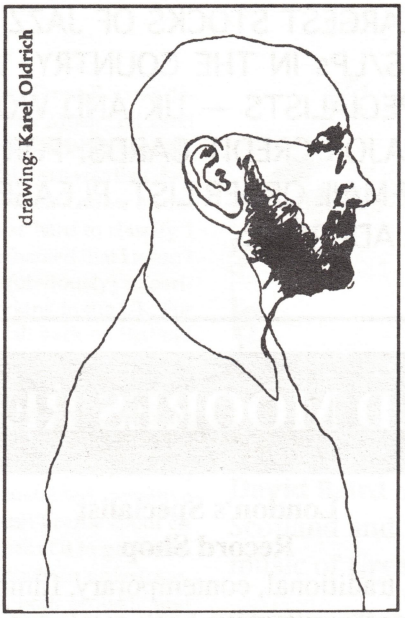
(8) Jeff Nuttall, **The Bald Soprano: A Portrait Of Lol Coxhill**, (published by Tak Tak Tak, Nottingham 1989).

(9) From an unpublished letter to the author, 1994. Also, see **Welfare State/Lol Coxhill** which documents some of the music composed, arranged and improvised for the Welfare State by Coxhill. It also features such musicians as Paul Rutherford and Phil Minton. Unfortunately, it is now deleted but its original catalogue number is Caroline/Virgin Records, Caroline C1507, 1975. Again deleted but also documenting work with the Welfare State is **The Story So Far.... Oh Really?** which also features amongst others, Kevin Ayers, and is therefore useful in seeing this crossover of musical styles — Lol Coxhill and Steve Miller, **The Story So Far.... Oh Really?** (Caroline/Virgin Records, Caroline C1507, 1974).

(10) See note (8)

(11) See the 1994 trio recording **Three Blokes**, in which Coxhill plays duo and trio improvisations with Evan Parker and Steve Lacy. Coxhill/Lacy/Parker, **Three Blokes** (FMP CD 63, 1994).

(12) See various solo recordings but particularly the nato album **The Dunois Solos**, recently reissued on CD — **The Dunois Solos** (nato CD DK 018 53040.2, 1981); and on vinyl — **Lol Coxhill: Solo Soprano Saxophone Improvisations** (Shock Records, Shock SX007, 1990).



drawing: **Karel Oldrich**

(13) Compare recordings of his group The Recedents which is almost totally improvised and The Melody Four who use standards and old songs as a basis for their music-making — The Recedents, **Zombie Bloodbath On The Isle Of Dogs** (nato CD 600329, 1991); The Melody Four, **Shopping For Melodies** (Chabada/nato, Chabada CD OH 19/20).

(14) These skills were deployed to memorable effect during his years as compere at the Bracknell Jazz Festivals of the 1980s. His success in this role, however, did sometimes militate against being taken 'seriously' as an innovative saxophonist, especially by those festival-goers who were unaware of his long history at the forefront of British experimental music. His deft, comic timing was once again exploited to great effect in a bit part for Sally Potter's arthouse film **Orlando** (1992). **Frogdance**, a documentary film about his musical activities was made by the British Film Institute.

Bruce Coates is an improvising saxophonist (e.g. duo with Zo Sosinka), writer and teacher. He is currently engaged in M.A. research into British free improvisation at DeMontfort University, Leicester, England.

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Violin Music In The Age Of Shopping
Intakt CD 038 CD

The first two of three CDs from Australian violinist Jon Rose chart the lives of his fictitious Rosenberg family and the last an extensive satire on modern shopping culture. **Pulled Muscles** is centred on violinist/athlete Dr Johannes Rosenberg and through him it attempts to satirise sport, politics and of course music. **Brain Weather** has further news of Johannes and introduces us to more of the family. Both of these works assail the listener with information, feverishly crosscutting between Rose's virtuosic violin, samples, electronic manipulation, parody, pastiche, live singing and spoken narrative. This technique is becoming a familiar one, supposedly reflecting the variety of media soundbites to which we are subjected daily. The problem is that there is just too much to listen to here and separating the wheat from the chaff (there is alot of chaff) is in the end just too tiresome a business. There are comparisons to be made with the likes of Negativland, and the press release for **Brain Weather** does just that, but in the end on these two outings Rose is just not as good. There are a few great moments, many provided by the excellent Phil Minton, but on the whole they are aimless collections of ideas.

It may be that Rose has realised the shortcomings of these earlier recordings because the third and latest, **Violin Music In The Age Of Shopping**, is frankly a hell of a lot better. Based on his book of the same name (see the review in **Rubberneck 18**), the piece makes use of many of the same basic devices as before, but is far tighter and rather than overflowing with ideas there is now a self-containment combined with a greater degree of craftsmanship. There is also a sense of musical development and a progression of ideas which is largely missing in the previous works. The presence of Irène Schweizer's piano and the prominence given to Shelley Hirsch's voice gives real musical clout. The humorous element, whether musical or literary, is this time far more consistent, showing a sophistication not obvious before. Hopefully, Rose will maintain this standard in future projects. *(RéR, 79 Beulah Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey CR7 8JG, England / Intakt Records, P.O. Box 468, CH 8024 Zürich, Switzerland)*
Bruce Coates

Post Prandials
Flight
Artichoke/Tristero 3001 CD

Post Prandials
Switched-On Irresponsibility
Artichoke/Tristero 3002 CD

The implications of the band's name — voguish intellectualism, dinner-party romps — is not promising. A voice remarks during the 30-minute title track of **Flight**, "I think that was supposed to be fun": fun and obligation, a somewhat paradoxical coupling. With three synths and two guitars, these New Jersey improvisors favour steely ringings, pretty twitters and humorous bubblings. Sounds tinge silence as a series of isn't-this-beautiful additions: no one evinces either the technical ability

DISCUS	PO BOX 658 SHEFFIELD S10 3YR UK
1CD FEETPACKETS LISTEN	MICK BECK'S IMPROVISING ORCHESTRA INCLUDES ALAN WILKINSON AND PAUL HESSION. EXCITING PLAYING, UNIQUE COMPOSITIONS *"Beck is a powerful yet subtle saxophonist" - Philippe Renaud (Improjazz)*
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4CD (DEC 95) MARTIN ARCHER GHOST LILY CASCADE	ARCHER'S FIRST SOLO RELEASE FOR SEVEN YEARS COMBINES IMPROV WITH CREATIVE USE OF NEW MUSIC TECHNOLOGY. WITH SIMON H FELL, CHARLIE COLLINS, JOHN JASNOCH, MARTIN JONES & OTHERS
5CD (DEC 95) NETWORK VOLUME TWO 52 MUSIC MINIATURES	THE SECOND VOLUME IN THE PROJECT SOUNDS HARDER AND DARKER THAN VOLUME ONE. ANYONE WISHING TO PARTICIPATE IN NETWORK SHOULD SEND AN S.A.E. REQUESTING DETAILS
6CD (MAR 96) THIS MUSIC IS SILENT UNTIL YOU LISTEN	FIVE ELECTROACOUSTIC COMPOSITIONS SPECIALLY WRITTEN FOR THIS PROJECT BY MARTIN ARCHER, SIMON H FELL, ROB GODMAN, KATHARINE NORMAN AND SIMON VINCENT
V1 (DEC 95) TRANSIENT v RESIDENT with DUNCAN MARSHALL	AMBIENT TO ABRASIVE SYNTHESIZER AND ELECTRONICS DUO TvR COMPRISES MARTIN ARCHER AND CHRIS BYWATER. THEIR FIRST RELEASE FOR DISCUS IS A SIXTY MINUTE VIDEO OF MUSIC COMPOSED FOR DUNCAN MARSHALL'S GALLERY OF FOUND PORTRAITS
VINYL STILL EXISTS	WE STILL HAVE HORNWEB SAXOPHONE QUARTET (KINESIS, SIXTEEN AND UNIVERSE WORKS) AND MARTIN ARCHER (WILD PATHWAY FAVOURITES) AVAILABLE IN LIMITED QUANTITIES @ £5.00 EACH

ALL ITEMS £10.00 PLUS £1.00 OVERSEAS

or musical intent to criticize or negate another's contribution. Exposure to over an hour of the Post Prandials begs the question: Why do Americans think we should be interested in their parlour-games?

The answer comes with **Switched-On Irresponsibility**, a distinct improvement. The core of the group (Bob Aaron, Keith Nicolay, John Burgos) have shed the dinner guests and brought in Daniel Carter (sax, flute, trumpet) and John Hajeski (violin). The title echoes Walter Carlos' 1968 moog chart-topper **Switched On Bach**, and there's much post-Nancarrow demented baroque. The previous anything-goes smugness is still in evidence, but gets interrupted by inventive synth programming (refreshing compared to the ubiquitous sampler) and genuine interactions. 'The Thorax Meets The Abdomen' builds into something hectic, though they don't know what to do with the heat they've generated, and Hajeski's hacking violin is tiresome. Carter's playing provides a much-needed focus, an arresting Miles-ish stillness around which the synths can revolve like funfair whirligigs. Aaron and Burgos should check out Wolfgang Dauner's pioneering **Output** (ECM 1006, 1970) to see how synth abstraction can develop impetus and direction. *(Contact: Keith Nicolay, 1953 65th, Apartment 2E, Brooklyn, NY 11204, USA)*
Ben Watson

Ntshuks Bonga's Tshisa!
Urban Ritual
Slam CD 213 CD

Graewe/Reijseger/Hemingway
Flex 27
Random Acoustics RA 007 CD

John King/David Moss/Otomo Yoshihide
All At Once At Any Time
Victo CD 029 CD

The trio is arguably the most flexible and variable context for improvisation, leading to variants such as three simultaneous soloists, sequential duos, or a more conventional lead soloist plus support. These three very different trios demonstrate some of the possibilities.

Ntshukumo "Ntshuks" Bonga is a South African alto sax player. He is joined by Marcio Mattos on bass and cello, and Ken Hyder on drums. Their music is completely improvised. Bonga takes much of the limelight, although Mattos and Hyder are never — could never be — *just* a rhythm section. The music varies between extremes. At one end, full tilt blowing; Bonga's playing tends to the upper end of the alto sax's range, giving it a declamatory, strident tone. The longest piece here, 'Mzangwa, Mzangwa', is dedicated to Dudu Pukwana, and Bonga's playing can radiate some of the same passion and intensity as Pukwana's. At the other extreme, the three build up and sustain moods over a long period, using quiet, very controlled sounds and reacting sympathetically to each other's playing.

Graewe/Reijseger/Hemingway produce 13 short pieces (most clock in at under three minutes, the longest is under eight minutes). Seven of the shortest pieces comprise a studio-recorded suite called '7 Satze'. Their brevity is a mixed blessing. Too often, a mood is created and ideas are beginning to be developed when a piece finishes. On the other hand, some pieces sound as if they are based on a single idea and it is better not to hear it over-extended. Overall, the longer pieces such as 'KP 596' (all the titles are similar to this — is a Braxton influence at work here, via Gerry Hemingway?) are more compelling as more interactions develop, particularly between Georg Graewe's piano and Ernst Reijseger's cello. These were recorded before a very appreciative live audience and demonstrate the often observed phenomenon that improv works better live.

King/Moss/Otomo were also captured live, at Victoriaville in 1994. They also deliver 13 short pieces. Their line-up of electric guitars, drums and electronics leads to "a delicate racket" as the sleevenotes appropriately describe it. Typical of

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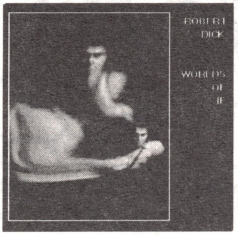
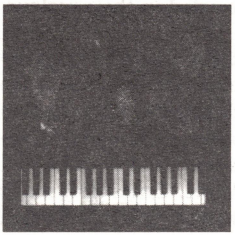


CD LR 224
ROBERT DICK

WORLDS OF IF

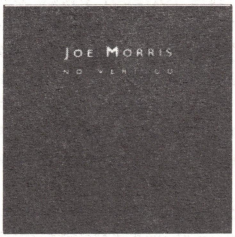
Solo CD by the composer, performer and improvisor who has revolutionized the soundworld of his instrument. His eight pieces are titled after science fiction works which inspired him to write the music. Robert Dick: "The sense that anything - truly anything - can happen is what I treasure above all in science fiction and I try to have that sense permeate my music".



CD LR 225
MICHAEL JEFRY STEVENS/ MARK FELDMAN

HAIKU

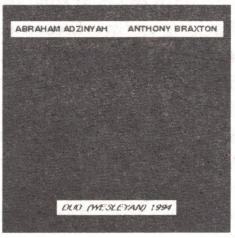
This duo collaboration of two brightest talents of the New York scene is an outgrowth of their musical association for the past 8 years. Ten compositions of the CD explore both improvised and composed dialogue between violin and piano, emphasizing the emotional and musical rapport between these two musicians.



CD LR 226
JOE MORRIS

NO VERTIGO

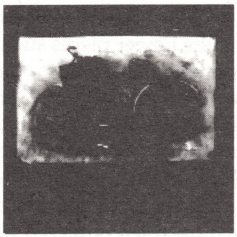
A solo CD by a Bostonian guitarist " who is perhaps the most exciting and original jazz plucker to emerge in the last decade" (Down Beat). Joe Morris plays acoustic guitar, mandolin, electric guitar and banjouke. He says: "My goal is to make unique music that will surprise you while remaining open to interpretations". Total duration 76'24.



CD LR 228 / 229
ABRAHAM ADZINYAH/ ANTHONY BRAXTON

DUO (WESLEYAN) 1994

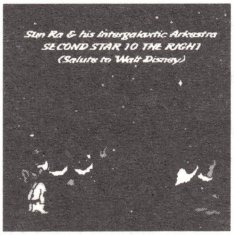
A double CD. A 100-minute dialogue between a master percussionist and an amazing saxophonist who plays his whole arsenal of saxophones and clarinet. Sit and watch how ideas are being born, developed and brought to a close, just to be started all over again.



CD LR 227
TIBOR SZEMZO

TRACTATUS

A new work by Tibor Szemzo took six months of hard work in the studio to produce, yet it is only 30 minutes and 30 seconds long. We dared to put it on the CD because it is a masterpiece. Anything else next to this composition inspired by the writings of one of the greatest minds on this planet ("Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus" by Ludwig Wittgenstein) would be counter productive.



CD LR 230
SUN RA & his INTERGALAXTIC ARKESTRA

SECOND STAR TO THE RIGHT (SALUTE TO WALT DISNEY)

This live concert is destined to become one of the most famous Sun Ra recordings ever. Why? Because it is astonishing, hilarious, outrageous, unforgettable. It appeals to old and young. It merges past and future, tradition and avant-garde, banality and greatness into one inseparable whole. It is Sun Ra, the one and only. Total duration 64'13.

For full Leo Records CD catalogue, LP list and discount prices write to: Leo Records, The Cottage, 6, Anerley Hill, London SE19 2AA

their working methods is 'Baby Blues For Marilyn'; over a sample of Marilyn Monroe singing 'I Want To Be Loved By You', the trio add random noise, a relentless metallic 4/4 rhythm, pastiche vocals, snatches of guitar melody which disintegrate. The total effect is disquieting but highly listenable. Elsewhere, the variety of sources that they subvert is vast. Russian polka, Asian opera, easy listening, rhythm 'n' blues are all grist to their mill — ground up and spat out, remade. Never a dull moment. *(Slam, 3 Thesiger Road, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 2DX, England / Les disques VICTO, C.P. 460, Victoriaville, Quebec, Canada, G6P 6T3 / Random Acoustics, P.O. Box 301070, D-50780, Köln, Germany)*
John Eyles

Luc Houtkamp
Live In Genève & Luzern 1994
X-OR FR 1 CD

Furt
Live In Amsterdam 1994
X-OR FR 2 CD

Holland-based X-OR releases two fine CDs which signal the launch of a new series — 'The Field Recordings'. Given its name it's not surprising that both are live offerings. Luc Houtkamp's CD represents, in my opinion, his best work in a solo context (the ruminations of his concentrated playing are shown in all their detail by a clear recording). Houtkamp's repeated explorations of two titles could suggest, say, Roscoe Mitchell's — but only at a superficial level. Houtkamp is his own man, with regard to both his personal, sometimes humorous, motivic cells and to the timbral qualities of his sax playing. The latter is ample proof of the depth and seriousness of his involvement with electronic music. Absolutely not to be missed: the beautiful hushed coda of track 5.

I recently read somewhere that not much of interest is nowadays produced in the electronic realm outside of 'ambient'; as counterproof just listen to Furt's CD. Furt is an English duo (Richard Barrett and Paul Obermayer — electronics) whose present focus of activity seems to be Amsterdam. The CD comprises two long tracks; their being almost devoid of weak moments gives away that we are listening to practised hands. Furt's goal seems to be to create an environment which has all the sonic richness of tape/computer music, but in a live dimension. This they accomplish beautifully (but how about a little more technical information next time?). Sometimes there's a pictorial quality which could be said to be Dockstader-ish; other moments have a harder, Faust-ian edge. But it's Richard Teitelbaum's more recent work that constitutes a useful point of entry for the listener. *(X-OR, P.O. Box 13435, 2501 EK Den Haag, Holland)*
Giuseppe Colli

Pandelis Karayorgis/Mat Maneri
In Time
Leo Lab CD LR 002 CD

Joe Morris/Rob Brown Quartet
Illuminate
Leo Lab CD LR 008 CD

Joe Maneri Quartet
Get Ready To Receive Yourself
Leo Lab CD LR 010 CD

Selections from the enterprising Leo Lab offshoot of Leo Records. On **Illuminate** guitarist Morris and alto saxophonist Brown are joined by bassist William Parker and drummer Jackson Krall for an album of thoughtful and generally low-temperature music. Although this was the first time these musicians had worked together as a foursome, it's clear from the start that they gel in a way that allows for great diversity of expression. There are two collective improvisations and one composition apiece from the joint bandleaders. Brown's, by far the longest piece on the album, is carefully written and episodic, while Morris' develops a brooding improvisation out of the opening theme to make probably the most delicate and affecting contribution to an impressive album.

Get Ready To Receive Yourself is the best release yet on the Leo Lab label. Joe Maneri is a theory and composition professor and a leading exponent of microtonal music. Nearing 90 now, he had close links with the exiled Schoenberg circle in the 40s and 50s and developed an interest in twelve-tone improvisation which led to gigs with Paul Bley and Gary Peacock. Full-time composing and teaching squeezed jazz out until the mid-80s. In 1992 he

New from PENUMBRA MUSIC:

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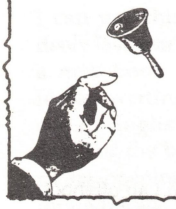

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performed with Paul Bley at the Montreal Jazz Festival and Bley, as well as George Russell and Cecil Taylor, are to be found praising Maneri in the CD insert. On this album Maneri plays reeds, and is accompanied by Matt Maneri (son? grandson?) on violin, John Lockwood on bass and Randy Peterson on drums. It's a brilliant and shocking work; the way in which he undemonstratively pulls apart musical conventions is best exemplified by 'Body And Soul', the most radical version of the old warhorse I've yet heard.

The Maneri / Karayorgis album is a quietist gem of concentration and elision which seems to develop out of the elder Maneri's ideas. Pianist Karayorgis etches bare melodic shapes while Maneri's violin snakes long convoluted lines with and against the grain of his partner's playing. There's a powerful mood of disquiet about the music, with no space for certainties. But despite this shifting unease, there's a surprisingly homogeneous feel: there are no sudden departures from the rules of the duo's game of controlled freedom. Well worth exploring.

Will Montgomery

John Wall
Alterstill
UtterPsalm CD2 CD

Alvin Lucier
Clocker
Lovely Music LCD 1019 CD

Robert Black
State Of The Bass
O.O. Discs 14 CD

These three recordings present three diverse elements of contemporary composition, having in common the electronic manipulation of sound. Wall it is claimed manipulates sampled material in such a way as to make it unrecognisable from its former self. It is true that the interweaving, layering and mutation of sounds is far removed from the work of many exponents of sampled music, who often delight in the instant recognition of sound objects in their work. However, to anyone with a large enough knowledge of the source material — which in this case includes early music, free improvisation and contemporary composition — his samples continually give clues to their authorship. Wall's strength is in the way that he is able to combine such diverse musical sources in a natural way, giving regard to form and not just content and without reverting to musical 'gags', often the result of these kinds of juxtapositions.

Clocker falls somewhere between live art and experimental music. A clock whose sound is processed through multiple digital delay units is controlled via sensors placed on Lucier's fingers which measure changes in skin resistance, allowing him to affect them by thought alone (another version was presented using a plant rather than a human to control the process). As an exercise in economy of material it is fascinating, Lucier creates a surprising amount of textural and rhythmic variety. However, spatial acoustic effects designed for the live arena, which would seem central to the overall experience of the work, are lost in the recorded version.

Most conventional of these recordings is Robert Black's impressive exploration of the bass in various forms from double to electric and finally a midi-controlling version. These seven composi-

tions were written for Black by a variety of American composers, most of whom use some kind of electronic manipulation. Perhaps the most interesting is John Cage's contribution as it represents a reassessment of the practice of improvisation, something he had always previously rejected. The other works by Dresher, Garcia, Knowles, Sellars and Zvonar are equally fascinating, giving new insights into a much underused solo instrument in composed music. *(UtterPsalm, c/o RéR Megacorp, 79 Beulah Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey CR7 8JG, England / Lovely Music, 260 West Broadway, New York, NY 10013, USA)*
Bruce Coates

The Blue Humans
Incandescence
Shock SX028 CD

John Zorn's Cobra
Live At The Knitting Factory
Knitting Factory Works KFW 124 CD

Incandescence features guitar cacophonist Rudolph Grey, with the late Beaver Harris on percussion and Jim Sauter of Borbetomagus depping for Arthur Doyle on tenor sax. It's a 20-minute CD released on the Shock label by Stefan Jaworzyn of Ascension, a UK duo who perform music that is highly derivative of New York noise purveyors like, well, the Blue Humans. The place to hear such sounds recently has been London's Disobey Club: Merzbow and Keijo Haino were magnificent; Rudolph Grey and Ascension were not. Some find a cleansing beauty in Grey's music. Others, and I'm in this camp, find it a snore. Extremity isn't interesting in itself and free jazz kudos doesn't make it so. By now, this kind of frowning transgression feels utterly played out. Shocked? Nah. And I'd rather play the sugary pop guitar version of Sonic Youth any day.

Cobra, Zorn's elaborate masterwork of musical gaming was performed by different ensembles at the Knitting Factory every month in 1992. This album is a sort of mega-**Cobra**, featuring brief selections in sequence from throughout the year. Thus the 10-strong troupe which assembled in May are only represented by a 2-minute snatch, while June get a hefty 11 minutes. This scheme means it's impossible to hear the intra-group dynamics that can evolve during the full piece, and turns an inherently fragmentary piece into a few shards of glass lying on the floor. But it works: OK there's some tedious sampler footling, but some of the pieces, such as the all-vocal April set (not *that* Jeff Buckley, surely) mark significant developments of the **Cobra** idea. An enthralling game played by a fascinating expanded community. Proceeds to charity. *(Shock, 56 Beresford Road, Chingford, London E4 6EF / Knitting Factory Works, 74 Leonard Street, New York, NY 10013, USA)*
Will Montgomery

Hal Rammel/John Corbett
The Devil's In The Details
Penumbra CD002 CD

Derek Bailey/Gregg Bendian
Banter
O.O. Discs 20 CD

Two discs of improvised guitar, both in duets with percussion. John Corbett responds to Hal Rammell's ambient effects with grace and care, the results resembling China's Nanguan lute music. Over the long haul, though, one notices a certain paucity of musical ideas: stunted jazz licks and one-dimensional ethnic rhythms outstay their welcome. John Cage's proposal that any sound matters appears to be an excuse to be content with not-very-much; there is no evidence that the freedoms of the genre have allowed the incubation of a musical personality on a par with Eugene Chadbourne, John Russell or Paul Buckton. Radu Malfatti contributes some heartfelt musician's-type words. Pleasant but slight.

Banter was recorded in a studio in New Jersey on 12 September 1994. Gregg Bendian is an associate of Cecil Taylor and bassist Lisle Ellis; he has a jazzer's grasp of the totality of choices, coupled with a modernist insistence on the new. His meticulous chip-chop is an ideal spur for Bailey, currently on a creative roll exceptional even in his outstanding oeuvre. Bailey's guitar unfurls gigantic musical concepts that resolutely refuse the pomp and circumstance of traditional structure. When Bendian opens up into harmony by turning to vibes, the rainbows of split-spectrum invention

25 YEARS

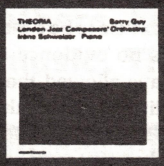
LONDON JAZZ COMPOSERS ORCHESTRA

Barry Guy, Henry Lowther, Marc Charig, Jon Corbett, Paul Rutherford, Chris Bridges, Steve Wick, Alan Tomlinson, Robin Hayward, Trevor Watts, Evan Parker, Simon Picard, Peter McPhail, Paul Dunmall, Phil Wachsmann, Howard Riley, Barre Phillips, Paul Lytton

Guests: Anthony Braxton, Irène Schweizer, Marilyn Crispell, Conrad Bauer, George Lewis, Dave Holland, Tony Oxley ...

Double Trouble

Harmos



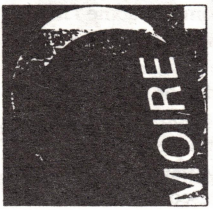
Theoria with Irene Schweizer

Zurich Concerts with Anthony Braxton

Portraits

ODE

Part I Part VII



TREVOR WATTS MOIRE MUSIC TRIO

Trevor Watts: Alto and Soprano
Colin McKenzie: Bass Guitar
Paapa J. Mensah: Drums, Vocals

Intakt CD 039

SCHWEIZER BENNINK

Irène Schweizer: Piano
Han Bennink: Drums

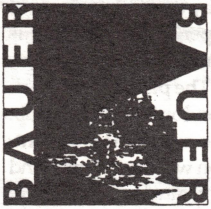
Intakt CD 010

KOCH-SCHÜTZ STUDER

Hardcore Chambermusic

Hans Koch: Clarinets, Saxophones
Martin Schütz: Cello
Fredy Studer: Drums, Percussion

Intakt CD 042



BAUER-BAUER

Conrad Bauer: Trombone
Johannes Bauer: Trombone

Intakt CD 040

JON ROSE

Violin Music in the Age of Shopping

Jon Rose: Violin, Electronics
Shelley Hirsch: Voice
Otomo Yoshihide: Turntables
Chris Cutler: Drums
Guest: Irène Schweizer: Piano

Intakt CD 038

Information: Intakt Records, Postfach 468, CH-8024 Zürich, Switzerland

are extravagantly multiplicious, sonic rayonism in matterdox complexitude. Ben Young's dry text provides a rare instance of close attention to the actual music on the part of an annotator. A mighty and enthralling communiqué from Tom Tedesco and O.O. Discs. *(Penumbra Music, P.O. Box 282, Grafton, WI 53024 USA / O.O. Discs, 261 Groovers Avenue, Black Rock, CT 06605-3452, USA)*
Ben Watson

Simon H Fell
Music For 10(0)
Leo Lab CD 013 CD

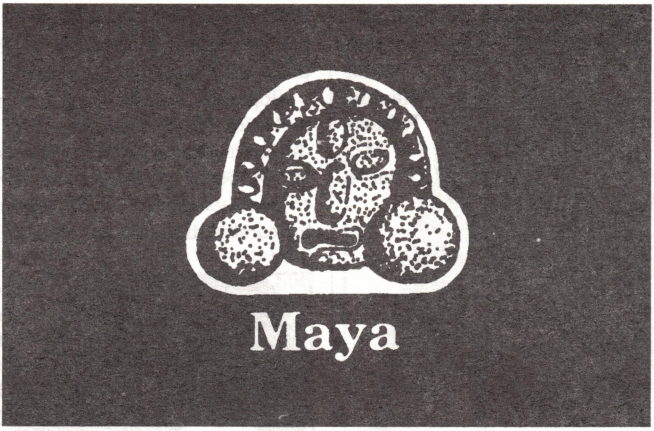
Vanessa Mackness/John Butcher
Respiritus
Incus CD21 CD

Lol Coxhill + Pat Thomas
One Night In Glasgow
Scatter 03 CD

The common thread here is the impact of the human voice, and its interaction with music. Simon Fell's **Music For 10(0)** was composed to celebrate the tenth anniversary of The Termite Club and the centenary of The City of Leeds, hence the rather awkward title (see **Rubberneck 17** for Fell's essay on this work). It is a "symphony for 10 improvisers and poet", combining composition and improvisation over 11 pieces (called "movements"). Between a prelude and a postlude are nine pieces, each named after a Leeds record shop, containing a recitation relating to the shop, its wares and its customers. Written and performed by Ben Watson, in the guise of "Out to Lunch", all have a contemptuous tone, and create a sour atmosphere. When attacking obvious targets such as Richard Branson ("A bearded wally who don't even like music builds an empire on the back of rebel sounds") they are often not sharp enough. But other targets (12" vinyl jazz funk imports, indie singledom) seem unworthy of such venom. Unfortunately, these recitations dominate the piece. This is a great shame, as some of the music is superb. Highlights include the opening of 'Virgin', where a beautiful chamber melody is assaulted by some violent alto sax intrusions, and a driving, strident tenor solo from Pete Minns on 'HMV'. In fact, all the sax players (Charles Wharf, Mick Beck, Alan Wilkinson, Minns) are terrific throughout. But, those recitations will deter me from regular listenings.

Together, Vanessa Mackness and John Butcher make for very uneasy listening. Mackness produces an astonishing array of vocal sounds. Operatic whoops, animal growls, screams, wordless cries and gasps are all in her repertoire. Frequently, the combination of voice and sax has sexual overtones. Mackness can sound as if she is in the throes of a powerful orgasm, or is giving birth. Butcher's sax seems to caress, which leads to moans of pleasure, or it can produce violent staccato sounds as if used to intimidate or attack. Mackness can also sound as if she is being menaced or even physically attacked, as on 'My Sighs In Shockings'. All of which makes for a powerful listening experience, although not a comfortable one. When I have been able to listen to the whole of this CD, I have felt like a voyeur by the end.

Lol Coxhill and Pat Thomas use occasional vocal interjections, mainly for wry comic effect, including a surreal sample of Richard Baker. These never intrude and the flow of music is not disrupted by them. Recorded live, Coxhill and Thomas sound made for each other, giving each other space in which to create, plus support when required. They complement each other, and do not make the duo sound like a battle for supremacy. Two long improvisations dominate proceedings. But even over 25 minutes the invention and flow of ideas does not flag. Delightful. *(Incus Records, 14 Downs Road, London E5 8DS / Scatter, (1/2) 79 West End Park Street, Glasgow G3 6LJ Scotland)* **R**
John Eyles



NEW RELEASES

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ShortCuts

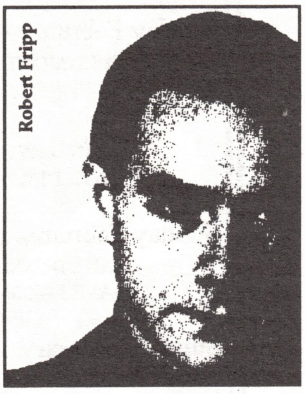
Reviewed by
Chris Blackford

Steve Nelson-Raney *Summer 1994* (Cody CD 01 CD) This is my first encounter with this gifted American soprano and sopranino saxophonist. I'm not sure how long Steve's been around but his playing sure sounds forthright and persuasive. **Summer 1994** comprises 12 solo improvisations which demonstrate his purposeful control over circular breathing and multiphonic techniques now, largely thanks to Evan Parker's innovations, very much a part of many solo sax improvisors' armoury. EP's influence is apparent but not emasculating. Nelson-Raney has a strong enough sense of his own direction within this 'tradition', and his ideas have plenty of gusto and penetration. Make his acquaintance. *(Cody Recording, 3065 N. Bartlett, Milwaukee, WI 53211, USA)*

Stephen Grew *Going On A Train Somewhere* (ZOT Music 006 MC) Stephen Grew, a pianist based in Lancaster, is a member of The Troupe, Charivari Trio and a prominent instigator of improv activities in his regional scene. **Going On A Train Somewhere** is his fifth collection of solo piano improvisations for the ZOT label. The five pieces reveal a generally understated sensibility, contemplative moods, even shades of Debussian impressionism during the slower passages. The cyclical patterns of 'You Could Be On A Sandbank' ebb and flow with a carefully executed grace. As improv piano styles go, Grew's is somewhere in the lyrical mainstream like John Law or John Taylor, accessibly pitched at the cusp of jazz and classical influences, rising to the odd percussive crescendo of Schlippenbach-like proportions. *(Stephen Grew, 51 Clarence Street, Lancaster LA1 3BD, England)*

Carlo Actis Dato *Urartu* (Leo CD LR 220 CD) A major name on the Italian new music scene, Carlo Actis Dato is yet to make a similar impact in UK circles. **Urartu** is the ideal introduction to this big-hearted reedsman's work. 16 sub-six-minute solo improvisations that capture the generous spirit of his playing on baritone and tenor saxes and bass clarinet. Expert use of multiphonic layering is an important aspect of his compositional approach. The pieces for baritone are the highpoints: the gripping *presto* of 'Amenhotep' even suggests the harmonic progressions of a Bach toccata; 'Yazilikaya' generates a primordial drone akin to a didjeridu, embellishes it with buzzing overtones and finishes with a trickle of improbably high notes. Entertaining, challenging and full of surprise moves, Dato is a compelling performer. Recommended. *(Leo Records, The Cottage, 6 Anerley Hill, London SE19 2AA)*

Robert Fripp *A Blessing Of Tears: 1995 Soundscapes, Volume 2, Live In California* (Discipline Global Mobile DGM 9506 CD) Imogen Holst once described her father's enchanting, Hindu-influenced **Two Eastern Pictures** (hymns for women's voices and harp) as conveying "that sick with perfume sensation". Robert



Fripp's second solo "soundscapes" album (check out the excellent and more ambiguous moods of **Soundscapes, Live In Argentina** also on his own DGM label) conveys a similar sensation. His moving sleevenote tribute to his recently deceased mother casts these eight *largo* improvisations in an elegiac light, heavily perfumed by the heady sweetness of requiem incense. To appreciate Fripp's unashamedly lush atmospherics without dizziness, try inhaling gradually with generous breaks between tracks: soon the senses begin to separate the melodic strands of these poignant, thickly textured pieces. Among solo guitar improvisors, Fripp is still at the forefront of those who are sensitively manipulating the latest technology in pursuit of new polyphonic soundworlds. *(Discipline Global Mobile, P.O. Box 1533, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP5 5ER, England)*

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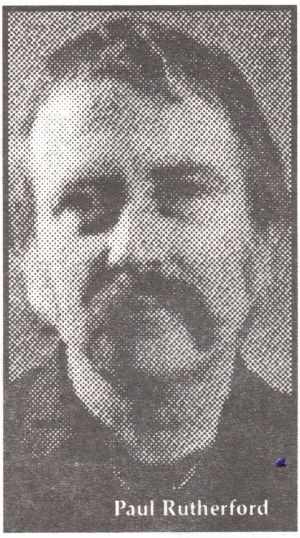
Evan Parker & Barry Guy *Obliquities* (Maya MCD9501 CD); **Paul Rutherford/Philipp Wachsmann/Barry Guy** *Iskra 1903* (Maya MCD9502 CD) Evan Parker and Barry Guy are two of Britain's most experienced improvisors who, in the 90s, are producing the finest work of their careers. Radical instrumental techniques have, over three decades, become comprehensively assimilated into a mature language of extraordinary sensitivity. **Obliquities** is only their second duo recording (superbly recorded in the studio!), but their intuitive rapport based on years of trio work with Paul Lytton manifests itself here. It's hard to talk of Guy as primarily a rhythmic or a percussive or a textural double bass player: such is the authority of his touch, the speed of his imagination, that all of these approaches are enacted virtually simultaneously. Likewise, Parker's soprano and tenor sax vocabularies now seamlessly abound with fiery overtones, aggressive slap-tongue stabs and the fleeting traces of melodic bop phrasing. **Obliquities** is therefore astonishingly complex and finely wrought, though parts of 'Ecliptic', 'Slope' and 'Belacqua', for all their complexity and speed of thought, are possessed by an underlying serenity. 76 minutes of demanding music. It's the sort of masterpiece that NASA should be sending out into deepest space, as proof to unsuspecting aliens that at least *some* intelligent, sensitive dialogue is happening on Earth.

Iskra 1903 were formed in 1970. **Iskra 1903** is the trio's second incarnation; violinist Phil Wachsmann replaced Derek Bailey in 1981. While the quality of the improvising from these seasoned improvisors is never in any doubt, the rather leaden acoustics of this Vancouver venue take away some of the dramatic impact and textural detail of the performance. Where Barry Guy's double bass was alive with myriad resonances in the studio of **Obliquities**, here his percussive attack and near-the-bridge graininess appear somewhat diminished. Wachsmann's brittle and sinewy pizzicato also lose some of their bite, though his carefully deployed, shimmering cascades fair better. Ultimately, it's Paul Rutherford's breezy trombone lines, floating over the gauze of strings, or erupting into abbreviated marches and fanfares, that break through to give the set its warmth, grace and tenacity. Informative sleevenotes to these recordings by Steve Lake and Barry McRae. *(Maya Recordings, Bramleys House, Shudy Camps, Cambridge CB1 6RA, England)*


Paul Rutherford

Billy Jenkins & The Fun Horns *Mayfest '94* (Babel BDV 9502 CD) "This concert was not meant to be recorded..." the sleevenote tells us. And should we be grateful to Glasgow festival sound engineer Peter Harris that it was? I think so! Billy Jenkins with the VOGC rhythm section and the four-piece East Berliners, The Fun Horns, who began working with BJ in August 1993. They've since done various festivals together (don't miss their Spring '96 UK tour). Jenkins has always offered an accessible, yet uncompromised, route to 'difficult' improv; he's never sought to submerge his interest for various popular musics and jazz styles in favour of total abstraction. **Mayfest '94** celebrates mostly his compositions, drawing on his eclectic range of styles with an ebullient energy and wit characteristic of previous projects. Under his superb direction, this 8-piece swings high, rocks out and embroils itself in intricate, improv harmonic invention, particularly among the horns, and achieves it all with panache and a great sense of timing that puts the band up there with Willem Breuker's Kollektief. 47 and a half minutes of unmitigated serious fun. *(Babel, 29A Connaught Street, London W2 2AY)*

Ascension *Live/Dead* (Dirter Promotions DPROMLP31 LP; **Ascension** *LP* (Fusetron 011 LP) Two LPs from the London noise-improv duo Ascension (Tony

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Irving: drums; Stefan Jaworzyn: guitar). **Live/Dead** predates last year's **Five Titles** CD, and again churns out anguished screams of guitar fuzz and distortion, along with ceaseless percussive thunder. The **Dead** side is probably their most extreme piece to date, and I can't hear how they can go beyond this for sheer high decibelic aggression; **LP** features two 20-minute pieces from 1994 which maintain another dense and vicious attack for most their duration. If the duo considered varying the dynamics of their work they'd gain more interesting contrasts in rhythm and texture, though at present they seem hell bent on proving that loud is best. Not so. *(Ascension, 56 Beresford Road, Chingford, London, E4 6EF)*

September Band *The Vandoeuvre Concert* (FMP CD 72 CD) In most hierarchical forms of music-making we accept the human voice as the foreground focus of our attention: other instruments tend to recede and assume accompanying roles in its presence. But improv *should* be egalitarian; yet, include a voice, especially one as idiosyncratic and attention-grabbing as Shelley Hirsch's, and that egalitarian equilibrium can go out of the window. There's hardly a moment in this hour-long French concert that isn't dominated by Hirsch's cast of cosmopolitan 'characters', who, in their fragmentary 'narratives', tread that fine line between grotesque parody and poignant melodrama, and push highly individual collaborators Hans Reichel, Rüdiger Carl and Paul Lovens into largely supporting roles. 'Back To The Reservation' comes closest to a group statement where Hirsch is more abstract. Strange: if this were a Shelley Hirsch album I'd be praising its vivacity, humour and beguiling moods; yet, as a fully *collective* statement which, presumably, the September Band aims to be, it seldom realises the full potential of all its multitalented personnel. *(FMP distributed by Cadillac & Impetus)*

John Butcher/Phil Durrant/John Russell *Concert Moves* (Random Acoustics RA 011 CD) If ever there was a case of an outrageously under-recorded British trio, here it is! Formed in 1984, they've recorded within the quintet News From The Shed and Chris Burn's Ensemble, but prior to **Concert Moves** have only released one trio album, **Conceits** (ACTA 1). Gigs have also been rare, but after only a few minutes the subtle attunement of their improvising becomes strikingly apparent. Butcher (tenor/soprano saxes) and Russell (guitar) have developed original vocabularies beyond the earlier influences of Evan Parker and Derek Bailey. The trio's restrained temperament is a lesson to those who assume that only high volume equates with intensity. Butcher uses a typically rich palette of delicate timbres: contourless, soft-focus smudges, high pitch slivers of notes and gently-blown multiphonic clusters that quiver and dissipate. Forever the trenchant *acoustic* guitarist, Russell's unique soundworld prioritises texture, thus establishing a disorientating sense of time and space with its spine-tingling 'glissandi', subdued rubs and scrapes and curious fragmentary lyricism. Given the virtual absence of identifiable 'guitar sounds' it may make sense to call him a post-guitarist. Durrant, about whom I know least, is a remarkably resourceful textural violinist who combines well with Russell to form the most quietly innovative of 'string sections'. This is non-idiomatic, acoustic trio improvising at its most sensitive and cohesive. Somebody, please release another CD by this major European trio! *(Random Acoustics, P.O. Box 301070, D-50780 Köln, Germany)*

Biota *Object Holder* (RéR RéRBCD4 CD) It's pretty pointless trying to classify the multi-dimensional music of Biota, but their latest work, four years in the making, displays a strong interest in song based structures. Not that guest vocalist Susanne Lewis is 'accompanied' in anything like a traditional manner: the formidable density of the polyrhythmic instrumental layers continues to confound, piled up to gridlock proportions, then skilfully dispersed, but Lewis' folky-pop vocals are given a welcome prominence in the mix, allowing more daylight and a sense of intimacy to penetrate the group's expansive, sometimes mechanistic-sounding compositions. Arrangements for nae, accordion and hurdy-gurdy usher in memorable folk dance themes, and flugelhorn and piano bring moments of calm and contemplation. While Biota con-

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tinue to produce exceptionally challenging compositions, **Object Holder** may well present newcomers, or those who have found some previous works a touch intimidating, with a few more than usual 'accessible' points of entry. The accompanying booklet is graced by the Mnemonists' extraordinarily colourful artwork, including dense collages and surreal figurative paintings. Everything comes in a quirky CD-size box. You always get more than you bargained for from a Biota album. True originals. *(RéR, 79 Beulah Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey CR7 8JG, England)*

Michel Doneda/Paul Rogers/Lê Quan Ninh *Open Paper Tree* (FMP CD 68 CD) This is effectively Mk II of the French based SOC Trio with British bassist Paul Rogers replacing hurdy-gurdy player Dominique Regef. Despite the loss of the hurdy-gurdy's strangely archaic soundworld, the improvisations still deserve to be called 'otherworldly' for their non-idiomatic textures and atmospherics. Rogers is *the* revelation here, as he ventures much further than usual into a pensive, non-rhythmic territory. Ninh plays like a percussionist, not a free jazz drummer, eschewing obvious pulse for a precise, spatially aware use of metallic sheets, cymbals, gongs and rattles. Doneda's soprano is the prime exotic ingredient: he paints in sound colours we don't yet have names for — an absorbing blend of the primordial and the futuristic. Only sopranoists of the calibre of Parker, Coxhill and Butcher can match the strangeness of his imagination. **Open Paper Tree** is a phenomenal album; the brooding 16-minute 'Variation On Tree Mutation' its highest achievement. One of the great improv recordings of the 90s. Long may this trio stay together!

Irène Schweizer - Han Bennink *Irène Schweizer - Han Bennink* (Intakt CD 010 CD) Don't be con-

Irène Schweizer

fused by Intakt's low catalogue number for this CD: it's a new collection of live recordings made in a Zurich jazz club, early 1995, and the experience of these two senior European improvisors is very much in evidence — there's not a dull moment in nearly 70 minutes. Schweizer's motivic gestures form the basis of this surprisingly melodic improvising: a dazzling display of post-Cecil percussiveness infused with ragtime, bop (especially Monk) and neo-classical flourishes; Bennink keeps time but in a wholly unpredictable way. Somehow he manages to simultaneously combine tight, sharply-accented rhythms with a breezy, spacious use of cymbals. A wonderful set, brimming with gaiety and character that is guaranteed to entertain as well as challenge. Top improvisors on top form, together. Don't miss it.

Daunik Lazro/Carlos Zingaro/Sakis Papadimitriou/Jean Bolcato *Periferia* (in Situ IS 164 CD) 'Periferia': Greek word. Among its various meanings: "to communicate"; "the perimeter"; "a ritualistic procession"; or (prepare yourself) "woman's buttocks". Whichever you feel best describes this captivating non-idiomatic journey, you should be mightily impressed by the quartet's highly evocative improvising: on 'Preparations' Lazro's smouldering baritone seems to be processing through a large, rather forbidding, cavernous ruin. The dappled chords of the piano against the dark *arco* hues of violin and double bass, or their combined pizzicato pointillism; most pieces possess that wonderful pictorial quality. A marvellous group performance. *(in Situ: UK distributors, Cadillac and Leo Records)*

Su Lyn, *Lines Of Desire* (Bruce's Fingers BF12 CD) Minimalist keyboard patterns meet Laurie Andersonesque vox on Lyn's second album. SH Fell and Bill Nelson contribute to the spartan arrangements. Thoughtful lyrics, if sometimes laboured in the telling. Initially soothing, but with an ironic sting in the tale.

PROGRESSIVE

Daniel Waldner founder of the Swiss RecRec Music label and inspirational promoter of international avant-rock, died 3. 9. 95. "Whoever has ears will here find a paradise. Listen!" — *DW*

Debile Menthol *Emile A La Campagne* (RecRec ReCDec 601 2CDs) Welcome reissue time for the now defunct, Swiss avant-rock nine-piece that launched the RecRec label with **Emile Au Jardin Patrologique** (1981). Plus their second and final album **Battre Campagne** (1984). **Emile** still sounds energetically light and breezy: crisp rhythmic sense and melodic flow influenced as much by new wave and folk styles as RIO avant-rock. **Campagne** is better still: greater structural complexity and textural intrigue, but without losing the melodic content of the songs. *(RecRec Music, P.O. Box 717, 8026 Zurich, Switzerland)*

Ne Zhdali *Hey, Driver, Cool Down The Horses!* (RecRec ReCDec 65 CD) Sadly, I missed this Estonian group's earlier **Rhinocerouses And Other Forms Of Animal Life** (ADM 10975), favourably described by Chris Cutler as "sometimes somewhat deranged". Maybe they've tempered a bit of that wilful derangement for the follow-up **Hey Driver** because here they're sounding especially craftsmanlike, though still able to infuse tightly structured songs with manic energy. The fluctuating metres work a treat against rousing choruses, often influenced by traditional Russian material, though revved-up and rocked-out the Ne Zhdali way. Their chugging instrumental 'Poitiers' is a cracker. Lots of catchy/quirky tunes to hum. Hugely enjoyable. Translations supplied.

Arto Lindsay Trio *Aggregates 1-26* (Knitting Factory Works KFW 164 CD) I've always been partial to Arto Lindsay's more romantically inclined work with the Ambitious Lovers, than the earlier noise-based DNA. His latest and possibly strongest group with Melvin Gibbs (bass) and Dougie Brown (drums) meets those two worlds about halfway. Wayward lyricism offset by jarring grooves and Lindsay's wonderfully liberated guitar exploring gritty rock and improv textural sonics. He's an underrated 'singer', too: oddly melodramatic in a laconic, conversational way, his phrasing peppered with unexpected intervals and pauses that release the hysteria in the lyrics. The many brief, probably improvised, instrumentals are sharp, steely fragments. Arto at his best. *(Knitting Factory Works, 74 Leonard Street, New York, NY 10013, USA)*

La 1919 *Jouer, Spielen, To Play* (Materiali Sonori MASO CD 90063 CD) Regulars Luciano Margorani (guitar/bass) and Piero Chianura (synths/sampler) are joined by fellow Italian, "noise-maker" guitarist Roberto Zorzi, and British drummers Charles Hayward (on five tracks) and Chris Cutler (on four tracks). There's a powerful, polyrhythmic percussive drive underlying their improvisations (echoes of early 70s Ginger Baker with Air Force, Bill Bruford with King Crimson) from which the two guitarists weave an exciting mesh of fuzz, distortion and avant-bluesy counterpoint. Samples and loops bring in other instrumental colours on the dense 'Fate Fagotto!', while Hayward chants a strange 'Sheffield Wednesday' against nightmarish electronics. The past and future of progressive rock colliding in perfect disharmony. *(Materiali Sonori, via Trieste 35, 52027 San Giovanni Valdarno, Italy)*

Doctor Nerve *Skin* (Cuneiform Rune 70 CD) Said, by composer Nick Didkovsky, to be the US group's most "extreme" project to date. No doubting the formidable complexity of the octet's performances involving copious amounts of directed improvisation. The brass and reeds of Dave Douglas, Yves Duboin and Rob Henke fire with a free jazz intensity, underpinned by Greg Anderson and Leo Ciesa's action-packed rhythm section; Didkovsky's guitar has the raw energy of hard rock allied to a textural imagination that comes from improv. And, there's still space for Marc Wagnon's delicate vibes and Michael Lytle's Stravinskyesque clarinets to add a contemporary chamber quality. **Skin** is the most structurally advanced and visceral progressive rock that I've heard in a long long time. A classic, no less. *(Cuneiform Records, P.O. Box 8427, Silver Spring, Maryland 20907-8427 USA)* **R**

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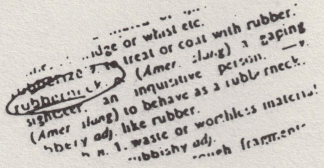

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